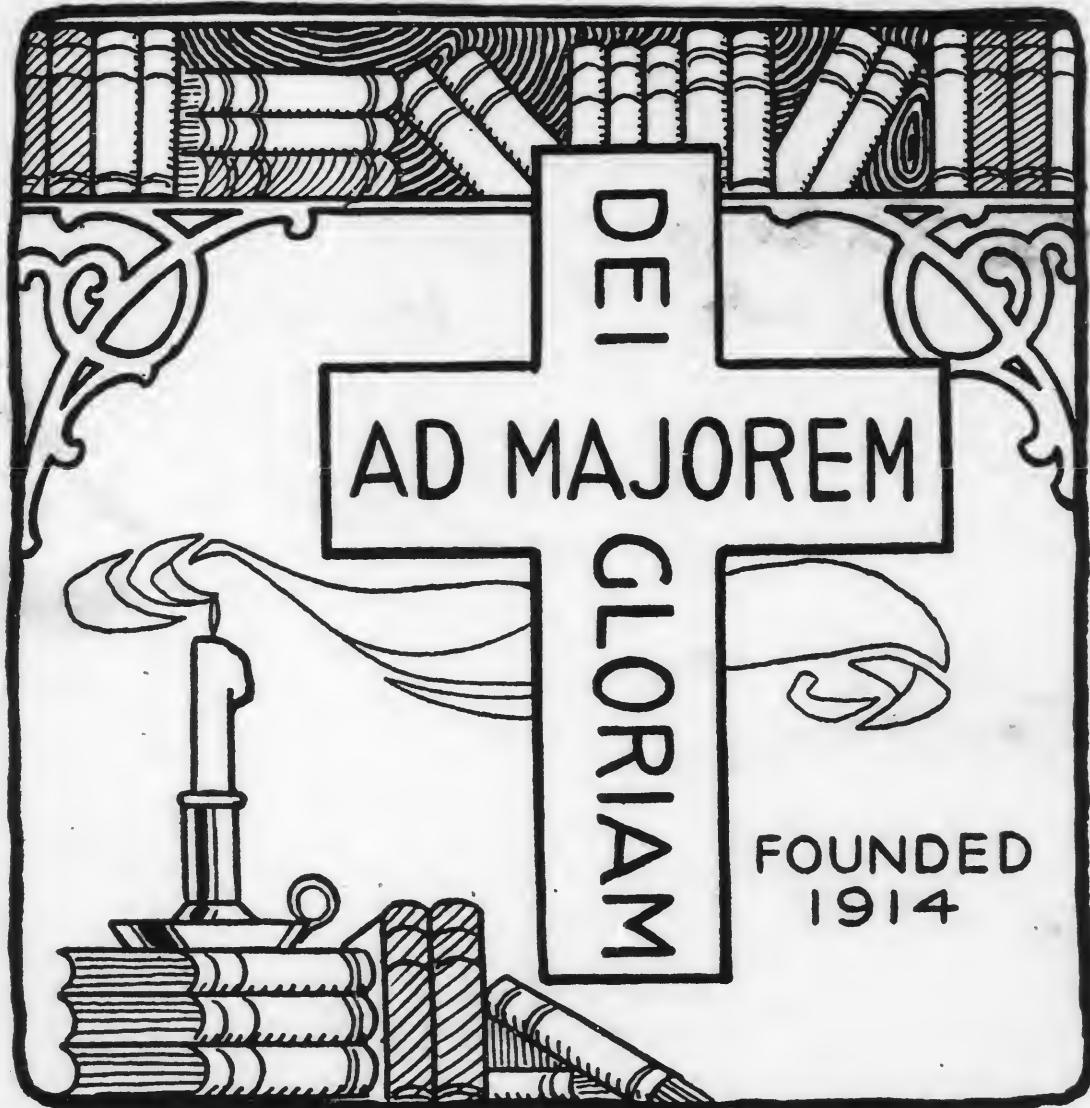


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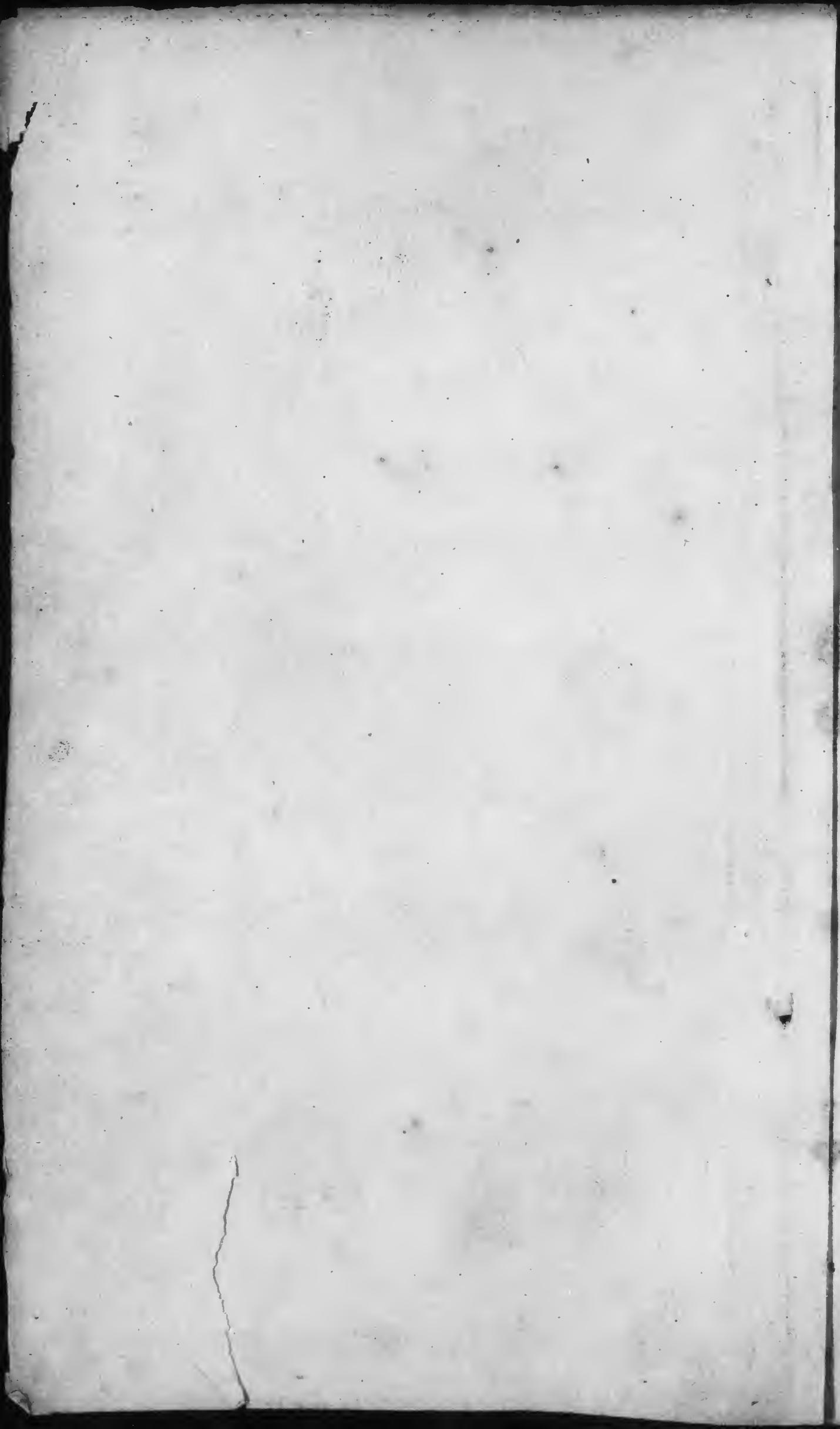


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# CONVERSATIONS FOR THE YOUNG:

DESIGNED TO PROMOTE

THE PROFITABLE READING

OF

## THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

BY RICHARD WATSON,

AUTHOR OF "THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTES," &c.

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Second Edition.

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Hæc sunt verba tua, Christe, Veritas Æterna! quamvis non uno tempore  
prolata, nec uno in loco conscripta. Quia ergo tua sunt, et vera, grata-  
ter mihi et fideliter cuncta accipienda. *Tua* sunt, et tu ea protulisti; et  
*mea* quoque sunt, quia pro salute mea ea edidisti.

KEMPIS.

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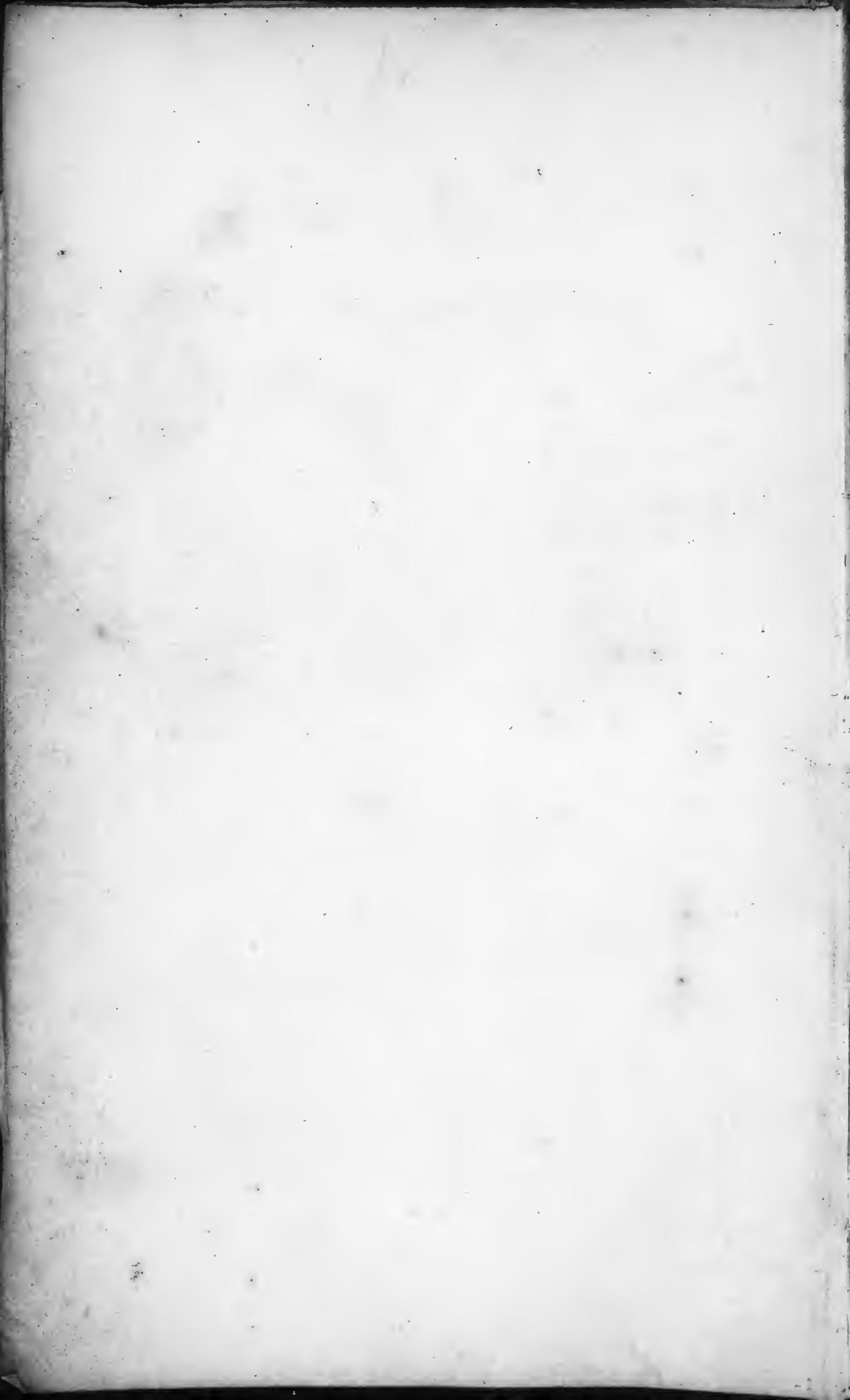
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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following little volume is of humble pretensions, but has *aimed* at supplying the want of such an Introduction to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, by young people who have not many advantages from books, or leisure, as should furnish them with *general views* on several important subjects, and fix in their minds such *first principles* as may assist them to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the words of eternal life; guard them against fatal errors; and open to them that scheme of Christianity, in experience and practice, to which every part of Divine Revelation is made subservient, and from which it derives its only value.

*LONDON,*  
*April 25, 1830.*



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# CONVERSATIONS

FOR THE YOUNG,

&c.

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## CONVERSATION I.

INTRODUCTION.—RELIGION.—USE OF REASON.

A.—I WISH instruction on several subjects which appear necessary for me either previously to know, or to have before my mind in a connected view, in order to peruse the Old and New Testaments with greater profit: Will you then allow me to propose to you such questions as may occur to me in reading the Scriptures, that I may have the advantage of your superior information?

B.—Most willingly; provided it be understood between us, that you seek this kind of knowledge with sincerity and seriousness; and that you will be contented with brief answers, such as may merely excite you to a more diligent reading of the word of God itself, and of such books as will more fully unfold to you its sacred mysteries.

A.—My questions will all be of a religious kind or

such as have some relation to that system of religion which is contained in the Holy Scriptures ; and I trust I have been already taught to view all subjects of this class as so connected with my everlasting interests and hopes, that I never trifle with them ; and as for your other condition, I shall be so grateful for your instruction as to leave the measure of it to your own prudence, only begging permission to repeat or vary my inquiries when I feel a difficulty in comprehending any thing.

B.—What then is ~~your~~ first question ?

A.—To begin at the foundation,—may I be permitted to inquire into the import of the word RELIGION ?

B.—The word is probably derived from a Latin verb which signifies *to bind*, or *to tie fast*, and well expresses the *obligation* of the creature to love and serve God, and those gracious promises and covenants by which God has been pleased to *bind* himself to bless and protect his obedient creatures. In its large and commonly-received sense, it is used to signify the worship and obedience we render to Almighty God, as the Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Governor of the world ; and it includes the discoveries which God has made of himself and of his will respecting us ; his dispensations of goodness, justice, and mercy ; and our acts of faith, thanksgiving, prayer, and submission. When it is used more specially, as when we say, “the religion of the Jews,” or “the religion of Christians,” it then means that system of faith and worship which is received by each. But do you know upon what religion is founded ?

A.—I have a general conception of its reasons ; but I wait to hear them stated by you.

B.—The grounds of religion are two ; the First includes the right of God, and the duties of rational creatures ; the Second, the insufficiency of creatures, and the infinite sufficiency of God.

A.—I understand by the former, that the right of God to rule the creatures he has made, preserved, and redeemed, and to receive from them worship and homage, is of the most absolute kind, since they owe their being itself, and all that renders existence happy, to him alone. But what do you mean by the insufficiency of the creature as a ground of religion ?

B.—We are not independent creatures. We cannot sustain life, any more than we could give it. We cannot control the circumstances by which we are affected for good or evil beyond a very limited degree ; we find nothing on earth which fully satisfies our desires, and we shall soon enter a new and unknown state of being; over the condition of which we have no control. What greater proof can we have of our own insufficiency ? The office of religion, therefore, is to lead us to God ; to interest us in his care ; to obtain from him, in answer to our prayers, protection, guidance, and aid ; and to establish and maintain relations of friendship with him in time and eternity. He alone is able to supply the wants of our nature, and so to order our condition that it may be “well with us ;” and to this he has condescended to engage himself by promise. Thus he said to Abraham, “I am the Almighty God,” or as read in

the old translation, “I am God ALL-SUFFICIENT ; walk before me, and be thou perfect.” He is all-sufficient because he is almighty, for none but an almighty Being could be to us an all-sufficient God. The grand *reason* of religion rests therefore upon the dependence and weakness of the creature ; its great *end* is to connect us with the all-sufficiency of God.

A.—Is not religion distinguished into *natural* and *revealed* ?

B.—It is ; but the distinction has no warrant in the Holy Scriptures, which always contemplate men as enjoying the benefits of those revelations of the character and will of God, which were made under the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations ; or as having wilfully perverted the original traditions of the first ages, and as being involved in a moral darkness brought upon themselves.

A.—How then was the phrase, *natural religion*, introduced into theological language ?

B.—First. Because it seems formerly to have been taken for granted, that some of the best notions among the heathen on morals and religion, were the deductions of their own reason from observing the phenomena of nature and the course of God’s providential government ; whereas, in truth, the religious knowledge of the early Patriarchs was transmitted to all the tribes and nations descended from them ; and the doctrines of Judaism were also not wholly unknown to those ancient nations with whom they had intercourse through many ages. Second. Because a class of divines in mod-

ern times thought, that they could best refute objectors to the Christian Revelation, by supposing a system of religious doctrines and duties rationally deducible from the works and government of God, and then proving how exactly revealed religion harmonized with this rational system.

A.—I remember to have read one of these books on natural religion, in which the author professed to forget all he had learned from the Bible, and to confine himself wholly to rational deductions from acknowledged principles and facts.

B.—But did you not wonder that this philosopher should be so much wiser than the philosophers of Greece, Rome, Egypt, and India, of whose contradictions, errors, and perplexities on the essence and perfections of God, the immortality of the soul, and the distinctions of right and wrong, which are fundamental principles in religion, you had both read and heard?

A.—Truly that did surprise me, and I could not help suspecting that such writers could not, so completely as they pretended, place their minds in the state of those who had never seen the Holy Scriptures; and that they attributed discoveries to the strength of their reason, with which they had previously become acquainted from the word of God.

B.—What would you think of a person closing his eyes, and then professing to give a lecture on light and colours, in order to show how an observant and philosophic man, although born blind, might conceive of, and describe them?

A.—I should think him very absurd, because his knowledge of light and colours, derived from his senses, must necessarily influence all his conceptions, and the terms by which he would express them.

B.—It is so in the case of writers on natural religion, and with those professed infidels who have appeared in Christian nations. That which they know aright, they have borrowed from the Scriptures ; and that which is erroneous and misleading in their works, may be fairly attributed to themselves. At the same time you are always to recollect, that there are many subjects revealed to us by God to which a right reason gives its subsequent testimony, although it could not have discovered them ; and that the works of nature, and the general course of human events, do not only in many respects correspond with, but mightily corroborate, the truth of the doctrines contained in the Scriptures.

A.—Will you give a few instances ?

B.—The marks of design and contrivance in the material world confirm the doctrine of the creation of the world by God, who is an infinite intelligence ; the vastness of nature confirms the doctrine of his omnipotence ; its manifest dependence upon some one power, which must always be present to uphold, control, and renew it, confirms the doctrine of God's omnipresence ; the oneness of design, and the intimate connexion of the various parts of the universe, confirm the doctrine of the Divine unity ; the course of events, so little controllable by man, and so often controlling him, indicates that the world is under superior government ;

and the almost uniform connexion which we see between vice and misery, and between virtue and happiness, establishes the doctrine of Holy Writ, that the Governor of the world is a Just and Holy Being. Many other instances might be stated, and indeed there are few doctrines of the Bible, except those which relate to the deep and mysterious nature and counsels of that Being whom none can know “to perfection,” but have a strong rational evidence, in addition to that stamp of Divine authority which is itself sufficient to confirm their truth. But you are to recollect, that the rational evidence of a truth which we attain *after* that truth has been revealed, is not to be concluded within the limits of man’s rational powers, *independent* of a revelation from God.

A.—I thank you for this distinction; the disregard of which I now see may be the source of great error: But what then is the true use of reason, in matters of religion?

B.—You put an important question, since the whole of the Scriptures are addressed to us as rational beings, yet as rational beings, both needing instruction, and who through a corrupt and perverse will are often indisposed to receive conviction. There is, First, an *intellectual use* of our reason, in reference to what purports to be a revelation from God. This consists in examining its evidences in order to ascertain whether the proof of its Divine authority be adequate and sufficient; and then, this being admitted, in fairly and honestly interpreting its meaning, without forcing a sense

upon any part of it in compliance with our own previous opinions or prejudices. But there is also a *moral use* of reason in matters of this kind, the obligation of which too many are apt to forget. This consists in using it *humbly*, under a sense of the weakness and imperfection of our own powers ; and with *docility*, as being willing to receive truth at all hazards and sacrifices ; and also *devotionally*, so that, accompanying our investigations with prayer to the “ Father of lights,” we may be preserved from error and led into all truth. You must also ever remember that the evidence of the truth of Scripture and of its leading doctrines is so given, that it shall not in all cases *necessarily* effect conviction, like a mathematical demonstration. It is addressed to the humble, and teachable, and serious ; but if men follow error, they will be sure to overtake it ; and if they love vice, their judgments will always be perverted by it. These are moral *laws* which we often see in force in the common history of men’s lives and conduct ; but they have an awful efficiency in matters of religion. Hence the incredulity of the Jews, which resisted the clearest evidence of the Divine mission of our Lord : “ They loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” In order to escape from the force of fact, they adopted the absurd theory, that Christ “ cast out devils by Beelzebub, the chief of the devils ;” and by that they were blinded and hardened. They stand therefore as the monitory type of all unbelievers, to the end of time, who run for shelter from the convictions of their minds and consciences to absurdities, which, except on

religious subjects, no man would or could espouse. Wherever there is pride, levity, and worldliness, errors in religion will follow, and that in proportion to the circumstances of temptation under which those who indulge them are placed.

A.—You admonish me, that in turning my attention to the Scriptures of inspired truth, in order to inform myself in “the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God” concerning me, I am engaged in a very serious and responsible work.

B.—Even so; for “this is not a vain thing, it is for thy life.” But be of good cheer, “the meek will He guide in judgment;” and “this is life eternal, to know the living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.”

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## CONVERSATION II.

### INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.—ADVANTAGES OF REVELATION.

A.—As I have satisfied myself both from the works I have read, and my own religious experience, however limited, of the truth and excellency of the Bible, I will not ask you to go formally into the proofs of the Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures; I shall nevertheless be happy to hear from you any confirmatory remarks on this point, that may incidentally arise out of the subjects on which I seek information. Allow

me however to ask, in what sense am I to understand that “all Scripture is given by *inspiration of God?*”

B.—It is the more necessary that you should understand this, because even some Christian writers, whom you may meet with, have spoken obscurely and unsatisfactorily on the subject, dividing inspiration into different kinds, and assigning it in different degrees to different portions of the holy volume.

A.—By inspiration, I conclude, I am to understand, that the sacred writers composed their works under so plenary and immediate an influence of the Holy Spirit, that God may be said to speak by them to man, and not merely that they spoke to men in the name of God, and by his authority.

B.—Precisely so; and you see that there is a considerable difference between the two propositions. Each supposes an authentic revelation from God; but the former view secures the Scriptures from all error both as to the subjects spoken, and the manner of expressing them. This too is the doctrine taught in the Scriptures themselves, which declare, not only that the Prophets and Apostles spoke in the name of God, but that God spake by them as his instruments. “The Holy Ghost by the mouth of David *spake.*” “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the Prophet.” “The prophecy came not of old time, by the will of man; but holy men of God *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*” For this reason, not only that the matter contained in the Book of “the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms,” (the usual phrase by which the Jews designated the whole Old

Testament,) was true ; but that the Books were WRITTEN under Divine inspiration, they are called collectively by our Lord and by his Apostles, THE SCRIPTURES, in contradistinction to all other writings ;—a term which you will recollect that the Apostle Peter applies also to the writings of St. Paul, and which therefore verifies them as standing on the same level with the books of the Old Testament as to their inspiration : “ Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you ; as also in his *Epistles*, speaking of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the *other scriptures*, unto their own destruction.” The Apostles also expressly claim an inspiration, not only as to the subjects on which they wrote, but as to the WORDS in which they expressed themselves. Further, our Lord promised to them the Holy Spirit “ to guide them into all truth ;” and that he was not to fulfil his office by suggesting *thoughts* only, but *words*, is clear from Christ’s discourse with them on the subject of the persecutions they were to endure for “ his name’s sake :” “ And when they bring you into the synagogues, and unto Magistrates and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say ; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say ; *for it is not ye that speak ; but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*” This inspiration of words is also asserted by St. Paul as to himself and his brethren, when he says

to the Corinthians, “ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth ; but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” Thus we find that the claim which the sacred writers make on this subject is, that they were in truth what they have been aptly called, “ the penmen of the Holy Ghost ;” and that the words in which they clothed “ the wisdom given unto them ” were words “ *taught* ” by the Holy Spirit.

A.—But how, then, am I to account for that difference of *style* which is observable in each ? that *manner* too, so natural to each, and so distinct in all ? with those reasonings, recollections of memory, and other indications of the working of the mind of each writer in its own character and temperament ?

B.—Some persons, observing this, have concluded their *style* and *manner* to be entirely human, whilst their *thoughts* were either wholly divine, or so superintended by the Holy Ghost as to have been adopted by him, and therefore, although sometimes natural, to be of equal authority as if they had been exclusively of Divine suggestion. This, indeed, would be sufficient to oblige our implicit credence to their writings, as being from God ; but it falls below the force of the passages above cited, and which apply the Divine agency to the suggestion of *words* also.

A.—How, then, am I to understand the case ?

B.—Simply by considering that an inspiration of words, either by *suggesting* those most fit to express the thoughts, or by over-ruling the *selection* of such words from the common store acquired by, and laid

up in, the mind of each writer, is quite compatible with the fact, that a peculiarity and appropriateness of manner might still be left to them separately. To suppose that an inspiration of terms, as well as thoughts, could not take place without producing one uniform style and manner, is to suppose that the minds of the writers would thus become entirely passive under the influence of the Holy Spirit; whereas it is easily conceivable that the verbiage, style, and manner of each was not so much displaced, as elevated, enriched, and employed by the Holy Spirit; and that there was a previous fitness, in all these respects, in all the sacred penmen, for which they were chosen to be the instruments of writing, under the *aid* and *direction* of the Holy Ghost, such portions of the general revelation as the wisdom of God assigned to each of them. On the other hand, whilst it is so conceivable that the words and manner of each might be appropriated to his own design by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, it by no means follows that both were not greatly altered, as well as superintended, although they still retained a *general similarity* to the *uninfluenced* style and manner of each, and still presented a characteristic variety. As none of their writings on ordinary occasions, and when uninspired, have come down to us, we cannot judge of the degree of this difference; and therefore no one can with any just reason affirm that their writings are “the word of God as to the doctrine, but the word of man as to the channel of conveyance.” Certain it is, that a vast difference may be remarked between the writings

of the Apostles, and those of the most eminent Fathers of the times nearest to them ; and that not only as to precision and strength of thought, but also as to language. This circumstance is at least strongly presumptive, that although the style of inspired men was not stripped of the characteristic peculiarity of the writers, it was greatly exalted and controlled.

A.—Do you conceive, then, that the same *force* of inspiration, so to speak, was exerted upon each of the sacred writers, or upon the same writer throughout his writings, whatever might be its subject ?

B.—There is no necessity that we should so state the case, in order to maintain what is essential to our faith,—the *plenary inspiration* of each of the sacred writers. In miracles there was no needless application of Divine power. Traditional history and written chronicles, facts of known occurrence, and opinions which were received by all, are often inserted or referred to by the sacred writers. There needed no miraculous operation upon the memory to recall what the memory was furnished with, or to reveal a fact which the writers previously and perfectly knew : But their plenary inspiration consisted in this, that they were kept from all lapses of memory, or inadequate conceptions, even on these subjects ; and on all others the degree of communication and influence, both as to doctrine, facts, and the terms in which they were to be recorded for the edification of the Church, was proportioned to the necessity of the case, but so that *the whole* was authenticated or dictated by the Holy Spirit with so full an

influence, that it became truth without mixture of error, expressed in such terms as he himself ruled or suggested. This, then, seems the true notion of *plenary* inspiration,—that *for the suggestion, insertion, and adequate enunciation of truth*, it was full and complete.

A.—All this seems to be clearly confirmed by the texts you have quoted; and the advantages we enjoy from a Volume having God for its immediate Author, cannot be too highly appreciated.

B.—True; but have you considered how important and numerous those advantages are?

A.—In part; but I am an humble learner.

B.—Suffer me, then, briefly to suggest some of them. In the First place, we receive authentic information from it as to the early history of the world, on which human writings are either wholly silent, or filled with fables. We are thus enabled to discover the uniformity of those principles, on which, both as individuals and as nations, men have been governed from the beginning of time; all bearing their testimony to the wise, the holy, the just, and the merciful administration of “the Most High who ruleth in the kingdoms of men.” The history of the one true religion is presented in a connected view from the moment when the fall of our first parents placed our race in new relations to Divine justice, and gave occasion to the first opening of the great scheme of our redemption, afterwards perfected by Christ, and now embodied in Christianity. The absolute darkness which must otherwise have rested upon the future condition of the world is dissipated by

the prophecies contained in the sacred books, and which, where still unaccomplished, command our full belief from the fulfilment of so many of their predictions already in a manner strikingly exact, as witnessed by the records of history. All great points of morals are now settled by an authority from which there is no appeal, and we are delivered from those diversities of opinion and frequent contradictions on questions of right and wrong which perplexed the wisest among the Heathen. We now learn also, by declarations made by Himself, on what terms, and by what means, the guilty may be reconciled to their offended God ;—we know that it is possible for us to be liberated from the degrading slavery of our sinful nature and habits, by the renewal of that nature through the mighty operations of the Holy Spirit ;—we have promises, confirmed by the most solemn acts of God, securing to us counsel, aid, and comfort, in the perplexities and afflictions of life ;—and, to crown the whole, a future state of felicity and glory is held out to us as the prize of our “continuance in well-doing.” In a word, we have the confirmation of a *divine*, and therefore an *infallible, authority* for every thing in RELIGION ; so that this is no longer left to the conflicting and doubtful opinions of man, most prone to err on a subject in which truth is the only thing of value ;—we have the authority of the infinitely wise and holy God for our OPINIONS, our PRAYERS, our TRUST, and our HOPES.

A.—These are, indeed, invaluable advantages ; and I shall not fail to recur to them when, in again reading

the history of ancient nations, I notice their ever varying opinions on moral subjects ; their uncertainty as to the very fundamental truths of religion ; their superstitions ; and the various evils which human philosophy served but to increase and diffuse.

B.—Nor need you confine yourself to ancient nations. The history of Europe in the middle ages stands as a monument of the fatal effects, both as to religion and morals, which result from ignorance of the word of God. Among infidels of modern times also, whilst we have seen nothing to justify their boast of the sufficiency of human reason, the most corrupting opinions as to morals, and, generally, that corresponding license in practice which has prevailed among them, give awful admonition to all, lest they reject “the word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation.”

A.—Were the communications of the will of God to man committed to writing previously to the giving of the law ?

B.—The silence of the Bible on this point warrants us to conclude, that the first *written* revelation of God to man was that inscribed by the finger of God upon the two tables of stone which were delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai ; nor did the same necessity exist previously, as the longevity of the antediluvians secured the accurate transmission of the traditional theology of more ancient times ; Methuselah having lived in the days of Adam, and Noah in the days of Methuselah. From Noah to Moses, also, few persons interposed ; and several of these, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and

Joseph, were favoured with immediate revelations, and were inspired persons. This traditional history and religious knowledge was embodied by Moses in the Book of Genesis, as far as the Holy Spirit judged it to be necessary for our instruction ; and we learn from this Book, what we should never otherwise have known ;— the process of the creation of the world ; the occasion, manner, and immediate consequences, of the fall of our first parents ; the leading religious opinions of the first ages ; the manner in which the human race was preserved from total extinction by the general deluge ; and the origin of nations.

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## CONVERSATION III.

## THE CREATION.

A.—AM I to understand from the first verse of the Book of Genesis, that this visible universe was created out of nothing ? or, that the creation of which Moses speaks, was the mere framing and disposing of the materials of the chaotic mass, as described in the work of the six days ?

B.—The philosophers of antiquity almost universally believed in the eternity of matter ; and therefore when they speak of creation, mean only the disposition and arrangement of things previously existing ; but in this particular we see one of the advantages of a revela-

tion: For Moses is to be understood as declaring that the world was made *out of nothing* by the will and power of God, and has thus opened to our minds the most impressive view which could be given us of his **ALMIGHTY POWER.**

A.—Does the original word used by Moses signify creation out of nothing?

B.—It signifies either the creation of the substance or form of any thing; but it is the uniform doctrine of the Old Testament, that the world was created out of nothing; and this is abundantly confirmed by the Apostle Paul: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things that do appear;” Hebrews xi. 2; that is, of things *apparent*, or from pre-existent matter. And when he says that we know this by “faith,” he means faith in the Holy Scriptures; and intimates that our reason would not have been sufficient to deduce that fact, which appeared so utterly incredible to heathen sages, that, amidst all their conflicting opinions, they appear to have almost uniformly agreed, that the matter of which the world was formed was eternal.

A.—Truly I perceive how this doctrine exalts our views of the power of God; for, since we are taught that all things which are were once nothing, and that they were spoken into being by “the Word of God,” we may well exclaim, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?”

B.—And thus a foundation is laid for the unlimited

and absolute *trust* of his creatures in Him, which could not be exercised by those who admitted of an eternal rival subsistence co-existing with Him, and tending necessarily, as they thought, to various disorders and evils, which the power of God itself could not control.

A.—I had not indeed conceived that this doctrine was so intimately connected with that entire trust in God which is so essential to the comfort and hope of creatures. I now see its importance. But what am I to understand by “the beginning,” in which God is said to have “created the heavens and the earth?”

B.—The beginning of *time*; for the moment that the heavens and the earth were created, time, as to this world at least, commenced. Time, as distinguished from eternity, is the measure of the duration of our world. In this concise manner, too, Moses expresses the eternity of God. Before time began He was in being, for by creating the heavens and the earth he gave birth to time itself; and before time began, He, to use the lofty language of the Prophet, “inhabited eternity.” You have noticed, no doubt, the similarity between the introduction of the Book of Genesis, and the first verses of the Gospel of St. John?

A.—Yes; and when that Evangelist declares that “the Word” was “in the beginning,” and made all things, and that without him nothing was made, I must also understand that he asserts that the Word was pre-existent to all created things, because HE WAS when they WERE NOT, and they were made by Him.

B.—This necessarily follows ; and also that He was not only pre-existent, but *eternal* : For St. John does not confine himself to the creation of the heaven and the earth ; but speaks of the creation of “ all things ” by the Word, and asserts that nothing created exists which was not made by Him. With this agree the words of St. Paul : “ For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers ; all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” Col. i. 16. If He is then before all creatures, he himself is UNCREATED ; if he is before all time, he is ETERNAL ; and if he created all things out of nothing, then he is truly GOD.

A.—This indeed cannot be questioned by any who sincerely believe the Scriptures ; but is not the work of creation attributed to the Father ?

B.—It is ; and also, in some passages, to the Holy Spirit ; but yet, whilst it is in fact the work of the Tri-une God, on account of some mysterious and special *personal* activity on the part of the Son, it is emphatically called His work. The Father created “ all things BY JESUS Christ,” says St. Paul ; and as “ the Spirit of God ” is represented, in the Mosaic account, as moving “ upon the face of the waters,” each person in the adorable Trinity is in Scripture manifestly set before us as employing his agency in the production and arrangement of this goodly world. We ought all there-

fore to unite in giving glory to the great THREE-ONE.

A.—This is indeed a plain manifestation of the three Divine Persons in *action*; but do not critics deduce the mystery of a plurality of persons in the Godhead from some grammatical peculiarity in Moses's account of the creation?

B.—The word used by Moses, and by us translated God, is ELOHIM. This is a plural substantive, which here and elsewhere Moses joins to a singular verb. From this it is very reasonably supposed, that the inspired writer intended to intimate the Trinity of persons in the Unity of the Godhead. This is however rendered indubitable by what follows in verse 26: “And God said, Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness;” and the Old Testament furnishes more instances of a similar kind: “Let *us* go down and confound their language.” “Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*? ” which all the best expositors, ancient and modern, have considered as clearly declarative of a plurality of persons co-eval and co-eternal in the unity of the Divine essence. “Of such a personality,” says Bishop Horne justly, “revelation informs us; it is that on which the economy of man's redemption is founded; what more natural, therefore, than that, at the creation of man, this form of speech should be used by the Divine Persons? What more rational than to suppose, that a doctrine, so important to the human race, was communicated from the beginning, that men might know whom they worshipped, and how they ought to

worship? And it is a satisfaction for us to reflect, that, in this momentous article of our faith, we have Patriarchs and Prophets for our fathers; that the God of Adam, of Noah, and of Abraham, is likewise our God; and that when we adore him in three persons, and give glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we do 'as it was done in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.' "

A.—Has it not been said that this form of speaking may be in imitation of the style of a king, who says **WE** and **US**, when he speaks of himself?

B.—This is a very modern usage, and unknown among the ancients.

A.—Does Moses speak of the creation of any other part of the material universe than the earth, and the planetary system connected with it?

B.—His leading design was, doubtless, to speak particularly of the creation of the earth, and its inhabitants; and of our atmosphere or heavens, and those celestial luminaries which serve us for "signs and seasons, for days and years;" that is, for the natural, civil, and ecclesiastical division of time. But when he observes, in verse 16, "He made the stars also," he asserts that the sidereal heavens, immense as they are, and filled with vast bodies spreading through spaces beyond the power of numbers to calculate, were the work of the same almighty power and infinite wisdom.

A.—And created at the same time?

B.—This is not explicitly affirmed. If we understand

the words in direct connexion with the former part of the verse, then the sidereal heavens were made on the fourth day; but if we consider them as a parenthesis designed to guard the doctrine that all the parts of the vast universe had their origin from the same creative fiat of Jehovah, they determine nothing as to the time of their creation. The former, however, appears to me the better interpretation.

A.—Are we then to suppose that God remained alone from eternity until this world was made?

B.—And if you were to suppose worlds brought into existence many millions of ages before ours, would there not then be a previous eternity in which nothing existed but God?

A.—That I did not advert to; but still, may we not infer from Scripture that angels existed before man?

B.—No doubt; but we were not speaking of angels, who are “spirits;” but of material worlds.

A.—Suppose you that these distant stars are inhabited by rational and accountable creatures?

B.—I have no very decided opinion on that subject. They may be the residences of unfallen and happy beings; or they may answer other purposes in the vast scheme of creation, of which we now know nothing. They are to us stupendous monuments of God’s power; and they may be designed for the residence of beings to be in future created, and perhaps instructed in the great principles of their interest and duty by a revelation of the whole moral history of this world, when it shall have been completed.

A.—How could that benefit them?

B.—If our creation and redemption have made a most *illustrious* and *peculiar* display of the perfections of God, and especially of his *moral* attributes ; and if the moral of this world's story goes to establish by *action* and *example* (the most impressive manner in which truth can be taught) the folly and hopelessness of rebellion ; and that submission to God is the highest interest of the creature ; do you think that the knowledge of such a history as the wondrous dealings of God with the race of man presents, and will present more perfectly when “the mystery of God shall be finished,” will not be important to them, and may not contribute powerfully, perhaps effectually, to their preservation from sin?

A.—This indeed I can well conceive ; but does it not appear incongruous that these vast bodies should exist several thousand years without inhabitants, and yet, as we are told by philosophers, as to some of them, have all the furniture of habitable worlds ?

B.—Even this is not quite clear ; it is not, for instance, fully demonstrated that the moon has an atmosphere. But allowing that they are habitable, have not many places upon this globe been uninhabited for several thousand years ? and yet does not the sun shine, and the clouds rain, and rivers flow, and vegetation flourish in regions where the foot of man never trod, or at least till in very recent times ? Here, then, are instances of adaptation for receiving inhabitants where no inhabitants are yet found ; countries which have been waiting for ages to be peopled. But remember I lay no stress on

any opinions of this kind, since God has not been pleased to gratify our curiosity. If, however, infidel philosophy, as you know, would reprove us for presumption, in thinking that our world, which is so little, and but one among a countless many, should have been so favoured by God, that he gave his Son to redeem its fallen inhabitants, we may, on the other hand, feel satisfied that the hypothesis I have hinted at has in it no improbability; and that, as it assumes the whole universe to be no older than our globe, the effects of the stupendous dispensations of God to mankind may be felt through all its parts in the salutary information they may convey to *all other* rational creatures, yet to be brought into being, on moral subjects, and may be extended by revelation to all worlds, although this alone has been the subject of redeeming grace. That the *instructive*, though not the *redeeming*, benefits of Christianity extend to some beings superior to, and distant from, men, is clear from the words of St. Paul: “To the intent, that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.”

A.—I have, indeed, after hearing of the number of worlds which revolve in the starry heavens, and their countless inhabitants, as stated in philosophic books, been sometimes startled with the thought, that this speck of earth and its tiny inhabitants could scarcely be thought the object of a Divine care so special and tender.

B.—But suppose all these countless multitudes of

other beings to exist, were you never reproved for this surmise by the words of the heathen poet, quoted by St. Paul, “We are his offspring ;” and surely not the less beloved because he may have a very numerous family beside? Granting, too, that those unstained worlds which glitter in the depths of space are filled with innocent beings, were you never reminded of the touching parable of our Lord?—“What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose *one* of them, doth he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing.”

A.—Certainly I ought to have thought on words which so affectingly teach God’s universal love to the creatures he has made, and to those especially who most need his compassion; and also that the number of happy beings, however great, can never render him insensible to the misery and danger of the few, however small.

B.—You will also often find, under the affectation of science, a great degree of ignorance and presumption. We have instances of this in the would-be philosophers of the class you have spoken of, who insinuate that man is an insignificant being, because the universe may be filled with rational creatures; and that he is the less cared for by God on that account. For do you not see 1. That man remains just what he is, however you may multiply the number of other beings? He has the same wants, capacities, fears and hopes; he is still an immortal creature, and an heir of everlasting happiness

or misery. All these circumstances remain unaltered ; and a being with such attributes and hopes, and capacities and destinies, can never be reduced to insignificance. 2. That this philosophy supposes, that, in proportion to the number of God's creatures, he must either be perplexed with their concerns, or become indifferent to each individual ; as though a father's affections must necessarily be weakened according to the number of his children. Thus, under the pretence of exalting the greatness and glory of God, they dis- honour him by their unworthy notions, and afford another illustration of St. Paul's words, " Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

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## CONVERSATION IV.

SUBJECT OF CREATION CONTINUED.—THE SABBATH.—

THE FALL OF MAN.

A.—AS THE earth appears to have been at first created in a state of rudeness and disorder, may we suppose any long period of time to have elapsed before the work of the six days commenced ?

B.—Some time certainly did intervene between that act of God by which the earth was created out of nothing, in the state described by the clause, " and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the great deep," and the creation

of light, which was the first step towards its being disposed and prepared as a habitable world. But whether the creation of the heavens and the earth in this dark and unformed state was a part of the first day's work, cannot with any great certainty be determined from the narrative of Moses. It would do no violence to that account to suppose that the earth remained for a considerable time in the state in which it was created, at least as to its surface, whatever changes might be going on in the interior of it. Nor would this make any difference as to chronology, since Moses manifestly fixes the era of the creation of the world at the first day, when light was created; for before that there could be no day or night, or, in other words, no distinction of time. But why did you ask that question?

A.—Because geologists seem to require more time for the production of their primitive formations by natural process, than the chronology of the world allows.

B.—That science is too imperfectly known to be the basis of any very confident argument; and the formations which they would account for by natural process, might be at first effected *supernaturally*; or there might be circumstances then existing to render natural processes, if such they were, much more rapid than they assume them to have been.

A.—Does Moses speak on such subjects with philosophical accuracy?

B.—Since he does not profess to teach natural phil-

osophy, he would naturally use the terms and adopt the common notions of his day with respect to natural phenomena, or he would not have spoken intelligibly. His philosophy as to the creation has, however, more accuracy than at first might appear.

A.—Will you favour me with an instance?

B.—He speaks of the creation of light before the sun, at which infidels in their ignorance and presumption have sometimes scoffed. Had he not been inspired he would not in this instance probably have so far contradicted popular notions, since no indication contrary to the notion that the sun is the original source of light appears to vulgar eyes. He however calls the sun and moon by a term which signifies “bearers,” or, “instruments of light;” and gives to light an independent existence, which is now admitted to be philosophically accurate.

A.—I remark a difference between the account of the creation of man and that of all other beings, in the solemn manner in which that act was commenced : “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

B.—This difference is most instructive to us. It marks the superior excellence and importance of the being to be brought into existence; the only creature of all with which the earth had been filled, that was made in God’s image; and under whose dominion all other things were to be placed. He too was the only being capable of knowing the Author of his existence, of recognising the wisdom, power, and goodness displayed in the perfect and beauteous world which

had been formed ; of holding intellectual and grateful intercourse with Him ; and whose powers were capable of being heightened and indefinitely exalted by that intercourse. But have you also remarked, in reading this account, that only a part of this wonderful being was formed, like the other animals, out of the matter of the earth ?

A.—I have ; for “ the Lord God formed man,” that is, the body of man, “ out of the dust of the ground ; and ” then, by a subsequent act, “ breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” I wish to know whether the life here spoken of was animal life ?

B.—Life indeed, in its lower principle, is a great and mysterious phenomenon, “ a wonderful and ever-active power, which in some sort equally pervades animals and vegetables, a fleeting and evanescent energy, which, unseen by the eye, untracked by the understanding, is only known by its effects ; and upon the failure of which the individual frame ceases, the organs lose their relative connexion, the laws of chemistry which have hitherto been controlled by its superior authority assume their action, and the whole system becomes decomposed and resolved into its primary elements.” \* This principle was at this moment attached to the organized frame of man lying prostrate and motionless upon the ground, out of which it had been formed ; but that something much higher than the

\* Dr. Good.

impartation of mere animal life is to be understood by the act of breathing into man “the breath of life,” may be inferred from the consideration, that the animal life in man is nothing superior in principle, or even in its effects, to that enjoyed by many of the inferior animals ; and yet they received it at the moment of their creation, when no such act as that of *breathing* it into them is ascribed by Moses to the Creator. Had man been a mere animal, there seems no reason why he should not have received animal life in the same manner as they received it ; and if we see here, that he becomes not merely a living body, but “a living soul,” by the breathing of God upon him, we are led from the earthly origin of the body of man, to the immediate impartation, from his Maker, of a living, spiritual, and immortal principle, joined with, and pervading, commanding, and sustaining his corporeal frame ; which principle we call *the human soul*.

A.—Have we any evidence of the existence of an immaterial principle in man, independent of the testimony of the word of God ?

B.—The doctrine of Scripture in this respect is confirmed by observation and reasoning. “Two distinct classes of phenomena, viz., extension, divisibility, gravity, form, colour, attraction, repulsion, &c., and perception, memory, reasoning, joy, grief, &c., become known to us in radically different ways ;—the one, through the medium of the external senses ;—the other, by consciousness. Are these phenomena the qualities of the same substance ? Is it reasonable to suppose

that properties so opposite to each other, the knowledge of which is obtained in so different a manner, inhere in the same permanent subject? If the qualities are thus essentially different, must not the essence be essentially different? The argument is, however, but partially developed. Some of these qualities are incompatible with each other, so that, like length and shortness, when the comparison is with the same objects, they cannot possibly be the qualities of the same substance. *Sensation* and *thought* belong to one of the classes of properties which have been specified; *divisibility* is included in the other. If sensation and thought were properties of matter, they must be *divisible*, because matter is divisible; every separate particle of the thinking and feeling whole must possess a separate portion of sensation and thought. But sensation and thought are not divisible, our consciousness being judge; the permanent *subject* therefore, of which these are the qualities, is certainly not *material*.” \*

A.—This is to me an argument at once plain and convincing; but, to proceed with my inquiries. I find that Moses not only marks the eminence of the seventh day, or Sabbath, by stating that God rested on that day from his works, but that “God BLESSED the seventh day, and SANCTIFIED it.” What am I to understand by this?

B.—By *blessing* the day, is to be understood the consecration of it to the religious use of man; that thus it might become the instrument of conveying special

\* Payne's Elements.

blessings by those acts of religious meditation and worship which were to be more formally and fully exercised on that day, and by which man was graciously allowed to hold a more intimate intercourse with his Maker. It was therefore **SANCTIFIED**, or set apart from common uses, that is, from the ordinary employments of life, for these holy engagements alone ; and it was designed not only for the benefit of the first man, but to establish a weekly commemoration of the creation of the world by God to the end of time, and to give leisure to all men for the exercise of those acts of worship by which they might draw near to God, and receive his blessing. Thus you learn, that the observance of a Sabbath was not first enjoined at the giving of the law of Moses ; but was instituted at the creation of the world, and became obligatory upon all the posterity of Adam, whether Jews or Gentiles, and a pledge of the kindness and good-will of God to them. You may remark, too, that if the religious observance of one day in seven was necessary to man in his state of innocence, that he might be called from the lighter employments of dressing and keeping the garden, when no cares of life oppressed his mind, and no corrupting examples were near him ; it is much more necessary for us to be carefully observant of that sacred day, who are in so much the greater danger of forgetting God through the influence of the manifold anxieties of life, and the more powerful circumstances of temptation in which we are placed. You will not omit to notice also that that day was not made a day of rest

only, but a hallowed, a “sanctified” day; which can only mean, that it was set apart for religious services, to the exclusion of every other; and that it is therefore to be regarded not so much as a *restraint* put upon man, as a *grant* made to him of a specially gracious character. We are therefore never to regard this institution “as a weariness,” like the corrupt Jews reproved by the Prophet; but to call “the day of the Lord honourable, full of delight;” and with joy bring into his house the offerings of our praise, and there celebrate at once our creation and redemption.

A.—How is it that we now observe the Sabbath on the first day of the week, and not on the seventh?

B.—This change of the day is to be traced up to the age of the Apostles, and must therefore be referred to their inspired authority. The first day of the week had this honour put upon it, as being the day of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead. The substance of the law of the Sabbath, as found in the law of the ten commandments which the Apostles repeatedly declare to be still obligatory upon Christians, is the observance of *one day in seven*: The day itself is a circumstance; but even this circumstance was not left to private individuals to determine. The Sabbath was ordained for public as well as private worship, and it was necessary that it should be observed by the whole community at the same time. The Divine Legislator of the Jews therefore specially directed that the first Sabbath kept in the wilderness should be calculated from the first day on which the manna fell; and,

among Christians, apostolic authority fixed it upon the first day of the week, and gave it the expressive appellation of THE LORD'S DAY.

A.—Why is the term LORD printed in capital letters, as I perceive it is in Genesis ii. 4, and frequently, although not uniformly, throughout the Scriptures of the Old Testament?

B.—In the passage you refer to, this name of God occurs for the first time; and it is there, and in all other places in which it occurs in capital letters, a translation of the original word JÉHOVAH, which was reckoned by the Jews the most sacred of the names of God. It implies *self-existence*, *independence*, and *eternity*, and signifies one that has being *in* and *of* himself.

A.—Was the prohibition respecting the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” the only law under which man was placed in Paradise?

B.—The epitome of the law of God as given both in the Old and New Testament, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength,” and “thy neighbour as thyself,” is doubtless the sum of all moral law, and contains in principle all particular commands or duties. This law, founded upon the natural relations of creatures to their Maker, and upon his just claims, his wisdom and his benevolence, may be concluded to be the law of all intelligent and accountable beings. It was the law therefore of man in Paradise; for who can doubt whether he was not bound to love God supremely? Obedience, however, is the test

of love, and therefore it was necessary to institute a test of obedience. Every particular law of God is our test, and some other particular laws might be given to Adam; but the great test which Divine wisdom was pleased to adopt, was the prohibition you have mentioned; and much as it has been the subject of unhallowed scoffing by wicked men, it was one which had an obvious fitness to the condition and circumstances of man.

A.—How does this appear?

B.—Because, since it was determined by the wisdom of God to place man in a state of trial, and to make his continuance in the Divine favour to depend upon his obedience, this obedience was, by such a prohibition, put more perfectly to the test than we can conceive it to have been by any other simple injunction. It was a prohibition at once adapted to guard him against the two chief sources from which only we can conceive that evil could approach him,—the dominion of sensual appetite, and intellectual pride. The fruit of the tree was pleasant to the eye, and therefore inviting to the *senses*, which it was an essential part of his duty to keep under subjection to his higher and governing intellectual nature; and the tasting of it held out an increase of *knowledge* by means unauthorized or rather forbidden; and therefore, in order to obey, it was necessary that he should humbly submit to receive that degree of wisdom which God was pleased he should attain by immediate communion with himself, and the use of those means which he had appointed. He who per-

fectedly preserves his *senses* under control, and maintains his *reason* in a state of humble subjection to God, cannot sin; and this test called man's virtue into exercise in both respects.

A.—I now see its wisdom. But how could creatures so perfect as our first parents be liable to temptation?

B.—Perfection in creatures is all relative. Absolute perfection belongs to God alone, and he is therefore the only Being who "cannot be tempted of evil."

A.—How am I then to understand that man was created "in the image of God?"

B.—The image of God in man is natural and moral. Our likeness to him in immateriality, intelligence, and immortality, constitutes the *natural* image of God in man. The *moral* image consisted in "knowledge," rightly employed, "righteousness and true holiness." Colossians iii. 10. Thus man was made a rational and immortal spirit, with no limit to the continual enlargement of his powers, had he legitimately exercised them. He was made holy and happy, and admitted to intercourse and vital union with God. He was placed in a world of grandeur, harmony, and beauty, canopied with other worlds, to exhibit the vastness of space, and the power and majesty of the Creator; whilst the immediate objects which surrounded him in Paradise, were calculated to call forth reason, taste, and devotion into the most salutary and felicitating exercise; yet, notwithstanding all this, there was, by the appointment of God, and the constitution of his nature, a liability to sin.

A.—How, by the constitution of his nature?

B.—I answer in the words of a learned Prelate: “ That in this compound nature of ours, there are several powers and faculties, several passions and affections, differing in their nature and tendency, according as they result from the soul or the body; that each of these has its proper object, in a due application to which it is easy and satisfied; that they are none of them sinful in themselves, but may be instrumental of much good when rightly applied, as well as occasion great evil by a misapplication; whereupon a considerable part of virtue will consist in regulating them.” \* That man was created with such appetites and passions, as were capable of excess, and therefore required this regulation, is clear from the account of Moses; and the preservation of innocence therefore demanded vigilance. No creature can be absolutely perfect, because it is finite; and it would appear that an innocent, and, *in its kind*, a *perfect* rational being, is kept from falling only by “ taking hold ” on God; and as this is an act of desire and trust, there must be a determination of the will to it; and so when the least carelessness, the least tampering with the desire of forbidden gratifications is induced, there is always an enemy at hand to make use of the opportunity to darken the judgment, and to accelerate the progress of offence. This is the scriptural account of the matter: “ So when desire hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

A.—Will creatures then, since they will be always

\* Stillingfleet.

finite, and therefore in this respect imperfect, always be liable to sin?

B.—By no means; it is a part of the gracious plan of God to reward those who pass through the trial of this present state, by placing them in his immediate presence, where the special communications of his grace, and the entire absence of all temptation and occasions of sin, will secure their felicity for ever. This Adam would probably have attained as the reward of his obedience had he been faithful; and this we shall receive as the “gift of God,” through Jesus Christ, if we believe in him, and “endure to the end” of our probationary state.

A.—Am I to understand that “the tree of life” was so called because its fruit was the food of man, and the means of sustaining life?

B.—Not his common food; for then it would not have been distinguished from the rest of the trees of the garden, which were all, with the exception of the tree of knowledge, given to man for his daily sustenance.

A.—Was it then so called because its fruit was medicinal, and tended, by a natural virtue, to maintain the body in perpetual health and life?

B.—This is not improbable; but what we know certainly is, that its fruit was in some way connected with man’s “life;” because the reason given for man’s expulsion from the garden was, “Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever.” This is all we are explicitly taught. It is right, however, that I should inform you that some

pious and eminent divines have thought that the tree of life was a kind of sacramental element; a *sign* to man of that covenant by which life was promised to constant obedience; and that the eating of it by our first parents was a religious act, expressive of their trust and hope in the promise of that eternal life of which it was the pledge. Certain it is, that it bears a mystic character in the allusions so frequently made to it in the Holy Scriptures; and in the Book of the Revelation to St. John, it appears as an emblem of Christ, the source and pledge of immortality to us. You must, however, learn always to distinguish between what is *explicitly* stated in the Holy Scriptures, and *necessary*, and *probable* inferences. The two former only demand our full assent; the latter claim it only according to the degree of their probability.

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## CONVERSATION V.

PERMISSION OF EVIL. — SATANIC INFLUENCE. — FIRST PROMISE. — SACRIFICES. — CHERUBIM. — CORRUPT STATE OF MAN. — ATONEMENT. — TRADITION.

A.—So MANY important general doctrines appear to be involved in the account of the fall of man, that I must beg your patience while I detain you a little longer on that part of the Mosaic history. It is clear from the account itself, that the serpent was changed

by the divine malediction from an animal of graceful form, and great sagacity, into a base reptile ; and therefore the scoffs of infidels at the meanness of the instrument employed by Satan are as misplaced as they are profane, since they know not what the serpent was originally : But I have often wondered why an evil spirit should have been permitted to seduce man to sin, and to effect so sad a change in a world which God had so lately pronounced “ very good.”

B.—And the reasons of his permission will not in the present state be unfolded to us. You must feel that you are not a proper judge of the vast plans and deep counsels of God, which reach to all creatures, and extend through time into eternity.

A.—Yes ; and I feel also, that the only safe and satisfactory mode of proceeding with the Scriptures, is, First, to satisfy myself that they are from God, of which the evidence is abundant, easily comprehended, and fully convincing ; and then thankfully to receive the truth they contain, leaving it to God to choose the best time and manner of explaining what is still mysterious.

B.—This is not only a safe and pious principle, but let it be impressed upon your mind, that it is the only *rational* one. Were God now to reveal to us all that our capacities could receive of his plans and counsels, there would be mysteries still, the reasons of which we could not comprehend ; and if it be proper now to reject that which is taught us because there is something still that we cannot comprehend, it would be equally proper then ; and so this sceptical principle would keep us from

receiving any truth for ever, and place the creature in a ceaseless struggle, not only with its Creator, but with its own finiteness. The true wisdom of the principle you have laid down, is therefore as conspicuous as its humility and piety. But pray tell me why a parent often refuses to give an answer to a child who asks him why he does this, or declines doing the other?

A.—I suppose, because the child would not in many cases understand the reason of his conduct, for want of an acquaintance with many other things which are above his capacity.

B.—Just so, in order to judge of many things which God does, or permits others to do, it would be necessary for us to know *many other things*; a number indeed far greater than our present powers are adequate to, or our circumstances in the present life would permit us to be instructed in. With what God has been pleased to reveal, and in the degree in which he has seen proper to reveal it, we have to do in this present life. The account of the fall, for instance, makes us acquainted with a fact which deeply concerns us, although the reasons of it are not fully explained.

A.—Do you refer to the doctrine, that it is one of the circumstances of human probation to be liable to diabolical influence?

B.—I do. Man in his state of innocence was exposed to the subtlety and malice of the devil; and this is the condition of his fallen descendants. We are placed under a scheme of recovery and salvation; but he who was “a liar and a murderer from the begin-

ning," now seeks to darken our judgments by various errors, and to destroy our souls by so engaging our hearts in worldly cares and pleasures, that we may neglect the "great salvation" of the Gospel.

A.—The very existence of a being of unmixed wickedness, employed in tempting us to sin and destruction, appears incredible to some.

B.—Yet there are certain facts which they cannot deny. We have among ourselves men who, by a long course of vice, appear to be wholly abandoned of God and goodness, and make, at least, fearful approaches to the character of beings of unmixed and unalleviated wickedness; and it is also common for persons of this depraved character, to apply themselves sedulously to the seduction of others, and especially to the corrupting of youth,—as though, like Satan, they envied innocence, and could not rest until they have withered every paradise to which they approach. There is nothing more incredible in the character ascribed to Satan in Scripture, than in this obvious fact.

A.—Is Satan present in every place, that men are exposed to his temptations?

B.—Omnipresence is one of the peculiar attributes of Deity; but Satan is called "the Prince of the Devils;" dominion is ascribed to him; the evil spirits over whom he rules are numerous, active, sleepless, unwearied; and if there be, as it seems intimated in various passages of Scripture, a *system* of invisible agency, organized against the plans of God, and the peace and salvation of man, under this chief and prince, then he may

be said to be present every where by himself, or by his agents.

A.—How shall we account for this subjection of many evil spirits to one?

B.—Partly from his superiority of intellect; partly on the same principle as that which leads the most wicked men often to combine under leaders to effect purposes gratifying to their passions, and implicitly to obey their chiefs. Of the laws of the invisible state we, however, know little; but enough is revealed to put us upon our guard; to urge us to fly to Christ for constant succour; and to make us “sober and vigilant.”

A.—I know that this power, though formidable, is not irresistible.

B.—True; and he who conquered man in his strength, shall be conquered by man in his weakness, if only he trust in the promised aid of Him who has “bruised the serpent’s head.”

A.—Your last quotation leads me to ask how that expression is to be understood.

B.—You must consider the circumstances in which man was placed by sin. He became liable to *death* as to the body; *spiritual life*, on which his holiness depended, was extinguished by that separation from God which wilful sin instantly effects; and he was adjudged to death in the sense of *eternal punishment*.

A.—How does it appear that future punishment was included in the penalty attached to disobedience?

B.—From the uniform tenor of Scripture; and in particular, from the general principle laid down, as a

kind of axiom, by St. Paul: “The wages of sin is death;” by which, as we see from his argument, he means more than the death of the body. “In the day” man sinned, this sentence would have been executed in its full extent; but that God had prepared a dispensation of grace and mercy, into which he was immediately received. His life was therefore spared, and the pardon of his offence was offered him through a Saviour who had been provided from “before the foundation of the world;” and who, even whilst man was receiving the sentence which doomed him to labour, sorrow, pain, and bodily death, was exhibited to his faith as the “Seed” of the woman. This illustrious “Seed,” or offspring of the woman, was to sustain a temporary injury by the bruising of his “heel,” which is a figurative representation of the temporary sufferings of our Lord, and he was to bruise the serpent’s “head;” that is, according to the same figurative manner of speaking, to inflict a fatal blow upon his power and dominion over mankind.

A.—Do you suppose that our first parents, and the antediluvian patriarchs, so understood this first promise of a Redeemer?

B.—They had not views so clear, as to the full import of this promise, as we who live under the light of the Christian dispensation; but there were several most important and interesting truths which they could not but deduce from it.

A.—Be kind enough to point them out.

B.—They must have had very lofty views of the

character of Him who should be able to destroy the dominion of that malignant spirit, whose subtlety and power they and the whole earth had so painfully and so recently experienced. They could scarcely consider this victorious personage as merely human, although he was to be born of woman ; and if so, this early promise contained in itself an intimation of the incarnation of a Divine Deliverer, of his voluntary, and therefore vicarious and sacrificial, sufferings for man's sake, and of the consequent moral liberation of man from the polluting influence of Satan, as well as from all other consequences of that transgression, which he, by his wiles, had introduced into the world. There were also probably, in that age of frequent sensible intercourse with God, several explanatory and additional revelations on a subject which respected the great basis of man's religious hope and comfort. From this time at least, we see that the Deliverer, thus promised, became the grand object of faith to good men, and by that faith they were saved. From that time too the rite of sacrifice commenced, which was typical of the true sacrifice of Christ ; and the notion of the vicarious and expiatory nature of the temporary suffering to be endured by the Seed of the woman, and its connexion with man's deliverance from the power of Satan, must have been as early as the institution of typical sacrifice.

A.—Were sacrifices then of Divine appointment ?

B.—That they were so, might be inferred from the difficulty of conceiving how else so remarkable a practice could have originated, or could have been invested

with so sacred a character ; but the case is made clear by God's visible acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, which was expressive of *his faith* in the efficacy of the death of the future Redeemer ; and by his rejection of Cain's offering, which was not a sacrifice, but an oblation of the fruits of the earth, and was not therefore, like that of Abel, an act of faith in the future Christ.

A.—I suppose this instance determines the case, by implying necessarily, that to approach God by sacrifice was the instituted mode of worship in the first family.

B.—Yes ; and God's visible acceptance of the animal sacrifices of Abel, presented in faith, set the seal of *Divine authority* upon that rite, to future ages.

A.—What may the placing of cherubim and a flaming sword at the gate of paradise, to keep the way to the tree of life, signify ?

B.—We learn from this the fact, that the garden of Eden continued to exist for some time after man's fall ; how long is not stated, but as a great point of public instruction was thereby symbolically represented and enforced, probably for a considerable period, perhaps to the flood. But before you can understand the import of this flaming symbol which consisted of a sword —like pointed flame, turning every way, placed between two glorious angels of the higher order, called cherubim, you must clearly understand the condition to which sin had reduced our first parents and all their posterity.

A.—I have been taught that the nature of man became wholly corrupt and sinful ; am I to understand this in its strongest sense ?

B.—Most certainly ; for when you consider the evils which have in all ages abounded in society, you must conclude that the fountain is most corrupt from which they flow, which fountain is the heart of man. Nor is there any exception ; wherever men have been found upon earth, whether existing in large states, or in sequestered and insulated communities, as in the distant islands of the Pacific Ocean, the same vicious dispositions and habits have been found predominant among them.

A.—I have read, in books of Travels and Voyages, of the simple and virtuous character of some of these islanders, and of the inhabitants of other parts of the world also.

B.—But a better acquaintance with these people has refuted all these stories, which were written under the first impressions of voyagers, and from very partial observation. Some of these uncivilized people are more timid, and apparently mild, than others ; and in comparison with the wild and ferocious savages, often met with by persons making distant voyages of discovery, would appear to advantage. But the inhabitants of the South-Sea Islands have been found so detestably wicked, that in the island of Otaheite, before Christianity began to exercise its influence upon them, the country was in a course of rapid depopulation through wars, murders, human sacrifices, and the intemperance of the inhabitants. The external appearance of the Hindoo is submissive and mild ; but falsehood, cruelty, and sensuality are the universal characters of the swar-

thy millions who people the plains of Hindostan. But do you not recollect the testimony of Him who perfectly "knew what was in man," as recorded in his own word?

A.—I recollect that our Lord in his conversation with Nicodemus says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

B.—And since he uses that as an argument to prove the necessity of our being born of the Spirit; that is, of our being regenerated and made holy, in order to our being admitted into the kingdom of heaven; it proves, that, in the state in which we are born into the world, we are so corrupt as to be wholly unmeet for heaven. St. Paul, you will also recollect, uses similar language when he speaks of all those who are not under the renewing influences of the Gospel as being "in the flesh;" and declares, that their moral corruptness is so absolute, that "they cannot please God;" that "the carnal mind is enmity to God," and "cannot be subject" to his law; and that "the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God," neither "can discern them."

A.—Certainly, the scriptural proof of the total corruption of our nature is most decided.

B.—And do you not see in the correspondence between this doctrine of Holy Writ, and universal experience, a strong confirmation of the truth of the Bible?

A.—I see the correspondence you mention, but I do not clearly see the argument.

B.—Consider then that the Bible assumes in every

page, that men are in the same fallen state throughout all the earth. The history of the fall of man accounts for this fact, which, on any theory not admitting the descent of all nations from a common stock, and the transmission of a fallen nature from the first pair to their descendants, could not be accounted for. But then neither of these circumstances could have been known to Moses or the Patriarchs but by inspiration. For how could they otherwise have known that in some distant, and then unknown, part of the earth, another primitive pair might not have been created, from whom an innocent race of human beings were then descending? or how, that every child of Adam and Eve, to the end of time, should partake of their fallen nature as to moral qualities? And if it be said that Moses at least knew that the nations of that part of the world in which he wrote were all descended from Noah, how could he know without revelation that the deluge was universal, when the most part of Africa and Europe, and all America and the Polynesian Islands, were utterly unknown in his day? If a pure race of human beings had any where been found on earth, it would have been a direct contradiction to the Scriptures; and that man is every where found in the moral state which the Bible describes, and which it assumes as the very foundation of human redemption, proves that it was inspired by God, because the certain knowledge of the fact was beyond the reach of man.

A.—I thank you for this argument; and I think I see to what point you are leading me. Do you not by

referring me to the moral state of man, first as an actual transgressor, and so under the sentence of eternal death ; and then as totally separated from the life of God, and therefore wholly corrupt and depraved; intend to show, that, but for an extraordinary display of God's mercy to him, he could not have been again brought within the hope of salvation ?

B.—That was my design. We have already seen that salvation was early promised through the voluntary sufferings of the “woman's Seed ;” and we know from St. Paul, that “that Seed” to whom all the patriarchs looked forward “was Christ.” But we have other subjects in connexion with this great doctrine to consider : Why was it necessary that Christ should suffer for our redemption ?

A.—That he might satisfy the demands of the Divine law, and render it consistent with the justice of God as the Governor of the world to forgive sin ; but I wish to have this further explained, in order that I may have clear views on a point infinitely important to me and to all.

B.—Recollect then that the law of God is “holy, just, and good ;” that it exacts no more than what is *right*, and that it would not be *right*, and therefore impossible to God who is perfectly righteous, to require less ; that the law is also *holy* and *good*, as well as *just*, and that therefore it would have been as contrary to God's holiness and goodness, as to his justice, to have required less of his creatures. His true and gloriously perfect moral character could not have been manifested by any

other law ; nor could the order, holiness, and happiness of the intelligent creatures under his government have been provided for and maintained.

A.—To uphold the authority of this law, therefore, I presume, was essential to the character of God as universal Governor, and to the interest of his creatures.

B.—You are right ; but you must also perceive that the authority of a law can only be maintained by the benefits it connects with obedience, and the dread of the penalties which it inflicts upon disobedience.

A.—Just so.

B.—And also that the infliction of a penalty upon criminals which has once been wisely and righteously attached to the violation of a law, is imperative upon a lawgiver.

A.—Certainly, or it ought not to have been threatened.

B.—You must also see that if inflicted upon one, it ought to be inflicted upon all.

A.—This I acknowledge, for otherwise the law would not be impartial and equal.

B.—But if not enforced upon one, for the same reason all transgressors ought to escape its infliction.

A.—Truly so.

B.—But if the law had been enforced upon all men, since all have sinned, we must all have perished ; and if it had been enforced against none, then this would have amounted to the repeal of the law, and the utter annihilation of the Divine government ; so that sin would have had no check, and the Governor of the world could

neither have been in reality, nor have appeared to us to be, *righteous* or *holy*.

A.—No, nor indeed *good*, because the true happiness of creatures consists in holiness ; and sin, even independent of direct punishment, is, and must be for ever, the source of disorder and misery.

B.—Mark then the infinite love, wisdom, and justice of God, all united in, and glorified by, the method of our redemption. The only-begotten Son of God was given to assume our nature ; to take our place as sinners liable to the penalty of death ; to suffer in our stead ; and to pay “the rigid satisfaction, death for death !” And as his Divine nature, his personal character as God-man, gave an infinite merit to his death, so it was accepted as a full compensation to Divine justice, in the place of the personal punishment of the offenders themselves. You may see, too, the connexion of the whole with the great end you have mentioned, —the maintenance of the authority of the law of God, in which all creatures are interested, and the righteous character of the Lawgiver. Who can doubt the *righteous* character of God, since he forgives no sinner but in respect of the death of his own Son on his account ? Who can doubt that sin is infinitely hateful to Him, and the object of his eternal displeasure, since, to wash away its guilt, it was necessary that the Divine Son of God should shed his own most precious blood ? And who can doubt whether God will maintain the authority of his own law, since he exacted its penalty from him before pardon could be administered to those who had violated it ?

A.—Every thing, I clearly perceive, tends in the Christian scheme to maintain this dominion of the law of God; since those who reject Christ are still left to its penalty, to be personally endured by them; and those who embrace him are brought under a regenerating influence, by which they yield a cheerful obedience to it in this life, and in another shall be put into a state in which they shall obey it without the least deviation for ever.

B.—You have rightly conceived the case; and let the love of God to you in the gift of his Son, and the generous love of your Saviour, in taking the load of your sins, and bearing them in “his own body on the tree,” properly affect your heart. Fly to his atonement for refuge; and as “you are not your own, but bought with a price, glorify your Saviour in your body and spirit which are his.” But we must return to the point from which this digression diverged.

A.—You were speaking of the cherubim at the gate of Paradise as symbolical.

B.—From what has been said, you perceive that man can only be saved by an act of grace, and not of merit; that if he plead his original rights to the Divine favour and blessing as a *creature*, he has plainly forfeited them by his offences; that if he meet God in the way of justice, he must receive according to his doings; that is, he must bear the penalty of sin, which is death; and that therefore he has no plea left but that of mercy, free and unmerited mercy, through the atonement made for his sins by the Son of God incarnate; which method

of salvation he is required to accept by acts of faith or trust in the sacrifice of Christ ; which faith was in those primitive times expressed by the oblation of animal sacrifices, prefiguring the offering of “ the Lamb of God,” as we have seen in the case of Abel.

A.—All this I comprehend.

B.—Can you not, then, understand the symbol of the flaming cherubim, guarding the way to the tree of life ? Does it not clearly intimate to you, that *life* is now administered by a new and different institution ? and that if any man attempt to approach God, like the self-commend ing Pharisee in the temple, to claim life on the ground of personal *merit* and *right*, which was the principle of the Adamic covenant of works, he shall be met only by manifestations of Divine wrath ? To all such “ God is a consuming fire ; ” and the sword of his justice, like a flame, turns every way, and forbids the administration of life to every sinner who confesses not his sin before the altar of his Redeemer’s sacrifice. The “ *new way* ” to life is opened ; the *old one*, as to man, is closed and guarded for ever.

A.—This, then, was probably the reason why this fearful symbol was kept for some time visible before men ; that, being cut off from all other hope, they might present their typical sacrifices of atonement as Abel, with confession of their sin, and as acts of faith.

B.—And you see how much they needed this impressive symbolical instruction, since Cain appears to have questioned the doctrine of justification by faith in

the promised Seed ; and, rejecting the atonement, sought acceptance through a mere ceremonial observance.

A.—When Cain complains of a part of his sentence as driving him “from the PRESENCE of the Lord,” are we to understand that there was in the first ages a permanent manifestation of God, such as the Jews in after-ages called the SHECHINAH, or cloud of glory ?

B.—Perhaps not a permanent, but an occasional one, in connexion with solemn acts of worship, and as a visible token of acceptance. Such tokens, we know, were in future times vouchsafed by voices, or by human and angelic appearances, or by fire consuming the sacrifices.

A.—Then you do not admit the notion of some, that the cherubim at the gate of Paradise marked the place where the antediluvian Patriarchs worshipped.

B.—And for this reason, that we read of another “presence” of God, as adverted to by Cain, and before which Abel seems to have presented his oblations. Beside, there was no manifestation of grace in the terrible spectacle exhibited at the gate of the garden ; and it is a confirmatory consideration, that where God afterwards fixed his residence among men for purposes of *grace*, the cherubim are represented, not under fearful, but mild and inviting, aspects. Thus cherubic figures were embroidered upon the veil which hung before the mercy-seat ; but not with flaming swords. Thus also they overshadowed the mercy-seat itself with their wings, and bent their faces towards it, as deeply interested in the dispensation of mercy to the guilty. They

represent the whole order of angels ; who are become the ministers of the grace of God to man, wherever the atonement of Christ is set forth and acknowledged.

A.—I see in this the force of St. Paul's interesting declaration, that the death of Christ has reconciled "things in heaven and things on earth," angels with men, and rendered them glad "to minister to the heirs of salvation." But allow me to inquire whether there were any traditions of the events mentioned by Moses, in his account of the creation and fall, among the early heathen nations ?

B.—It is natural to suppose that these facts descended by tradition into other branches of the family of Noah, as well as into the Abrahamic branch ; but you are to recollect that we have no heathen records extant near so ancient as the writings of Moses ; and that long before the oldest of their writers lived, all the facts of the earliest history of man had been distorted by that vain, but ever fertile, and often monstrous, imagination which originated the idolatries and superstitions which every where prevailed. Still we see indications sufficiently strong of a common source from which all the heathen mythologies have been derived, and of a truth which the wickedness of man converted into bewildering and ridiculous, but, as taking the name and authority of religion, of fatal error.

A.—Were not the Golden Age of the classic poets, and the story of the Garden of the Hesperides, founded upon the tradition of the Mosaical Paradise ?

B.—No doubt ; but it may afford you some pleasure,

if I give you instances from other sources. An ancient Egyptian book, ascribed to Thoth, says, "In the beginning there was a boundless darkness in the abyss; but water and an intelligent Spirit acted with Divine power in the midst of the chaos." An ancient Phenician writer, a fragment of whose works has been preserved, makes "the principle of the universe to be a dark air, and a turbulent chaos." According to the ancient Persians, "God created the world at six different times." Among the Hindus, the Institutes of Menu are of very high antiquity; and in these is the following sublime passage, mixed up with many absurd fables: "This universe existed only in the first Divine idea, yet unexpanded, as if involved in darkness. Then the sole self-existing Power, himself undiscerned, but making the world discernible, appeared with undiminished glory, dispelling the gloom. He whom the mind alone can perceive, whose essence eludes the external organs, who has no visible parts, who exists from eternity, even He, the Soul of all beings, whom no being can comprehend, shone forth in person." Among the Chinese the tradition is, "that the heavens were first made; then the foundations of the earth were laid; the atmosphere was then diffused round the globe; and last of all man was created." Even in America we see the rudiments of the same traditions. The aboriginal Peruvians believed that, at the beginning of the world, a being named *Con* levelled mountains and raised hills by the breath of his mouth; that he filled the earth with inhabitants, giving them fruits and bread in abundance;

but that, being offended with their transgressions, he afflicted their lands with the curse of sterility. The Satya age, or age of perfection, held by the Brahmins of India, plainly refers to the state of man in Paradise; and there is an ancient bas relief in one of their temples, representing in one part an incarnation of one of their deities struggling with a huge serpent, and in another treading its head under his foot. The history of Cain and Abel also is found, a little altered, in an ancient Hindoo legend given in one of the volumes of the " Asiatic Researches :" " Bramah, becoming incarnate, produced the first woman Satarupa, or Iva, out of one half of his body, and the first man Swayambhuva, or Adima, out of the other half. This pair had three sons; Cardama slew his brother Daesha, with a club, as he was performing a sacrifice: But Daesha had previously wished that he might always remain a vagabond on the face of the earth." It is remarkable, too, that the Iroquois, a savage nation of America, should have preserved a tradition of the same event. They believe that the first woman was seduced from her obedience to God; and that, in consequence of it, she was banished out of heaven; that she afterward bore two sons; that one of these attacked and slew the other; and that many children afterwards sprung from the same woman, who were the ancestors of all mankind. Many other instances have been collected by the researches of the learned; but these will suffice to show how strongly the leading facts of the first period of the world's story were

impressed upon the minds of the descendants of Noah.

A.—Do not these instances prove that the traditions of the earliest events in human history among all nations had a common source? And does not this go far to confirm the Mosaic relation?

B.—Indubitably so; for if Moses, or any subsequent writer, had invented the account in the Book of Genesis, how could he have made it agree with the traditions of India and America, of whose inhabitants he knew nothing? Another proof arises out of the languages of the earth, which were manifestly drawn originally from one tongue; which likewise agrees with the Mosaic account. The division of time into *weeks*, also, so generally adopted from the earliest time, can only be accounted for from the hallowing of the seventh day, as stated by Moses; since it is entirely an arbitrary division, and was not indicated, like *months* and *years*, by the revolutions of the moon and the earth. For days, and months, and years, are pointed out by the movements of the great clock of nature, the planetary system; but as it has no index for weeks, we can only refer this division of time to the institution of the Sabbath.

## CONVERSATION VI.

PHYSICAL VARIETIES OF MEN.—ANCIENT CHURCH OF GOD.—NOAH.—THE DELUGE.—THE ARK.—PROHIBITION OF BLOOD.—THE RAINBOW.—CURSE OF CANAAN.

A.—Has it not been argued from the difference of physiognomy and colour which obtains in the human race, that all nations cannot have descended from the same pair?

B.—It has; and at first sight it appears difficult to conceive how the gigantic Patagonian of seven feet in height, the dwarf Laplander of four; the fair-skinned native of the northern regions, and the dark African; the nicely-turned heads of Georgia, the flat skulls of the Charaibs, and the depressed visage of the Tartar, could have issued from a common parentage. Yet the most eminent naturalists have demonstrated that all these are but *varieties* of the same race, produced by the effects of climate, different kinds of food, peculiar manners and customs, and morbid and hereditary affections. They prove this from the effect produced by several of these causes, taken separately or together, upon different animals. M. Blumenbach, the celebrated naturalist, has selected the swine genus for his proof, and has drawn from it a chain of argument the most convincing; though the dog or the sheep would have answered his purpose just as well. He has succeeded in showing that the swine genus, even in coun-

tries, as in America, where we have historical and undeniable proofs of its being derived from one common stock imported in modern times from Europe, exhibits in its different varieties distinctions not only as numerous and astonishing, but, so far as relates to the exterior of the animal, of *the very same kind*, as are to be met with in the different varieties of the human species, both as to hair, colour, shape of the skull, &c.

A.—Have not some attempted to account for the colour of the negro race, by supposing that the mark set upon Cain was the changing of him into a black?

B.—Yes; this was once used by our slave-dealers as an argument to justify African slavery: But they unfortunately forgot that all the descendants of Cain were destroyed by the flood; and that Noah descended, not from Cain, but from Seth.

A.—What might that mark be?

B.—Interpreters of Scripture, whose fault it often is not to be wise enough to confess their ignorance, have indulged in various fancies on this subject, any one of which has just as much evidence as another. All we can know is, that it was such a character as answered the two-fold purpose of being a visible sign of God's anger against his crime, and securing him from human vengeance. He was seen to be a man under the mark of God's displeasure, and thus human beings rather regarded him with horror and pity than with revenge. With this mark he departed to his exile in the land of Nod, or the low country, as it is supposed, of Susiana, or Chusistan.

A.—Several of his descendants are mentioned by Moses as inventors of tents, of musical instruments, and the art of working metals.

B.—And, as such, they are called “the fathers” of such as practise those arts, according to the Hebrew mode of speaking.

A.—Have we any notice of good men in those days forming themselves into a visible Church of God, in distinction from the wicked and irreligious world?

B.—Before the flood, as after, every family which had a pious head was probably a Church of God, of which the father was the ruler and the Priest; but when irreligion began to abound, as in the days of Enos the son of Seth, it is said, “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord,” or, as it is better rendered in the margin, “Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord;” that is, they called themselves the *servants and worshippers of the Lord*, to distinguish themselves from such profane persons as had forsaken him.

A.—This distinction will perhaps explain Genesis vi. 1, 2, where the “sons of God” are said to have intermarried with “the daughters of men.”

B.—It does; and it shows us that, as from the beginning men were justified by faith, they who were thus justified were adopted into God’s family, and acquired the high title of “the sons of God,” as now. These intermarriages, however, showed the rapid deterioration both of the antediluvian Church and the world at large; and from those irreligious connexions, which

passion and sense, unregulated by piety, dictated, the worst effects followed. The mound of distinction between the Church and the world was thrown down, and the whole earth sunk into that awful state of irreligion and violence which is described by Moses; so that after such a delay as gave to man space for repentance, and such warnings as illustrated the longsuffering of God, they were destroyed by the most terrible and universal calamity the earth has ever witnessed, a universal deluge of waters; Noah and his house only escaping.

A.—Noah was “a righteous man.”

B.—Yes; and you may see in him the true source of acceptable righteousness in all ages. His righteousness sprung from his *faith*.

A.—You suppose, probably, that there was much infidelity in the old world.

B.—This, with its consequent violence and wickedness, was its leading sin, rather than idolatry, of which we read nothing. There was probably less ignorance among the antediluvians than after the dispersion of mankind; but intellectual pride uniformly generates unbelief. The translation of the pious Enoch was, no doubt, designed to demonstrate the existence of a state of future blessedness, and, by consequence, of future punishment; both which we therefore conclude were to a great extent denied. From the same tendency to infidelity we may account for the disbelief of the antediluvians in the threatenings of God as to the flood denounced to them by Noah, who was a public

Minister of God, and an inspired “Preacher of righteousness.”

A.—Contrasted with this general unbelief, the faith of Noah appears very illustrious.

B.—It was of that character which proves itself to be the work of the Spirit in the heart of man, and specially the gift of God; for he was not only “moved with fear” to prepare his ark, but he calmly rested in the promise of God for his preservation amidst the convulsions of nature, and the wildly tossing floods of a deluge which destroyed the whole race, and greatly changed the very structure of the earth.

A.—When St. Paul informs us that he became “heir of the righteousness which is by faith,” does he mean the same thing as when he says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness?”

B.—The same; for, as you will see that the temporal promises made to Abraham involved the promise of Messiah, so the ancient promise relative to “the Seed of the woman” was involved in Noah’s preservation; for if the whole race had been destroyed, that promise could not have been accomplished. The faith of Noah, like that of Abraham, is therefore to be regarded as terminating ultimately in Christ; and it is on this account that a justifying efficacy is attributed to it. Besides, God promised to establish “his covenant” with Noah, which covenant contained the promise of the great Deliverer.

A.—Have not some of our objectors questioned

whether there is water sufficient in the ocean to cover the earth to the depth spoken of by Moses?

B.—Ignorance lies generally at the bottom of such objections, or at least bad men more thoughtlessly frame objections to the Scriptures than to any thing else,—a sufficient proof of their enmity to this holy volume. An eminent philosopher has however told them, that if all the water were precipitated which is held in solution by the atmosphere alone, it would probably cover the earth to the depth of above thirty feet. In addition to this we have the waters of the ocean.

A.—Where are the mountains of Ararat upon which the ark rested?

B.—Mount Ararat lies in 39 deg. 30 min. N. latitude, and 40 deg. 30 min. E. longitude, on the vast ridge of Taurus, nearly midway between the southern extremities of the Euxine and Caspian seas. On his descent from Ararat, the Patriarch planted the vine; and in the same neighbourhood excellent wine is still made. Olive-trees are also found in the vicinity; and you recollect that the dove returned with an olive-branch to the ark.

A.—Are there not many natural proofs of a general deluge of waters?

B.—They abound in every part of the earth. Stratified mountains, of different heights, exist in various countries, between whose strata various substances of marine, and some vegetables of terrestrial, origin repose, either in their natural state, or petrified. The plains of the arctic circle are overspread with the shells

of Indian seas, and with the bodies of elephants and rhinoceri, surrounded by masses of submarine vegetation ; all showing a mighty and general convulsion, truly called a “breaking up of the fountains of the great deep,” and the agency of rushing waters sweeping confusedly together the products of land and water. Cuvier, a great authority in geology, is of opinion that it is thoroughly established by philosophic investigation, “that the crust of our globe has been subject to a great and sudden revolution, the epoch of which cannot be dated farther back than a few thousand years.”

A.—When it is said, that “*it repented the Lord* that he had made man upon earth,” how am I to understand that and similar expressions?

B.—Just as you understand those passages which ascribe “hands” and “feet” to the most High. It is a mode of speaking “after the manner of men ;” and the noble and spiritual manner in which the Scriptures discourse of God, when they directly refer to his nature and perfections, will prevent every attentive reader from misinterpreting these figurative expressions taken from the bodily form or the mental feelings of human beings.

A.—I observe a distinction of “clean and unclean,” in the animals received into the ark.

B.—And this circumstance proves the early institution of animal sacrifices ; for as animals were not used for food before the flood, the distinction of the clean from the unclean could only refer to the choice of such as had been declared acceptable to God as sacri-

fices, and used to typify the pure and spotless character of the GREAT OBLATION,—“ the Lamb of God.”

A.—Do not many of the inquiries, as to the manner in which the animals preserved in the ark were collected by Noah, and how he embarked and sustained them, with some others of the same kind respecting the deluge itself, proceed upon a total forgetfulness of the agency of God?

B.—This shows their folly ; for in the whole account, Moses represents the deluge as an event scarcely less vast and extraordinary than the creation itself, and as resulting equally from the almighty power of God. Almost every thing connected with it bears the stamp of miracle.

A.—But the building of the ark was the work of Noah.

B.—So it appears ; for miraculous power is never uselessly exerted : And many who were drowned in the flood might labour, under his direction, to erect this stupendous vessel ; just as many may assist in various ways to build the Church of God, who will never be saved in it.

A.—This work shows Noah to have been a man of great mechanical skill.

B.—And to have had good artists and mechanics at command ; a presumptive proof of the high state of practical science, and of the arts, before the flood.

A.—Which knowledge Noah and his sons would introduce into what we may call the second world.

B.—And this proves the fallacy of those hypotheses.

to which too many learned names have incautiously given their sanction, that the primitive nations rose gradually out of a rude, ignorant, and almost savage state, and acquired their knowledge by slow progress. They have amused themselves by tracing this process, as to language and the arts, from the simplest elements, wholly unmindful of the scriptural account, and of the fact of the rapid rise of nations, after the dispersion distinguished for their rich and splendid architecture, which itself presupposes great scientific knowledge, as well as mechanical skill.

A.—They forget, too, the vast “city and tower” which was commenced before the dispersion. But, to return: Why was “blood” prohibited to Noah and his descendants when the use of animals for food was for the first time granted?

B.—Because “the blood is the life thereof,” and, as such, constituted the *essential part* of animal sacrifices; *atonement* being made only with that. Blood was therefore a sacred, a devoted thing, and men were thus constantly reminded of that grand axiom in the government of God over fallen man, “without shedding of blood there is no remission;” a principle which involves two doctrines which we ought never to forget, —*that the guilty deserve death, and that they can only escape it through the death of the innocent.* Thus their daily food was made *prefigurative*; just as the same prohibition, extended to us by apostolic authority, renders our abstinence from blood *commemorative* of the Great Sacrifice, who gave “his life,” his “blood,” for us.

A.—If there was rain before the flood, there must have been rainbows, since they are formed by the striking of the beams of the sun upon the opposite drops of falling rain.

B.—Perhaps it might be shown, that by a slight difference in the state of the atmosphere, or in the refrangible power of the drops of rain before the flood, no rainbow would be visible to those upon the common level of the earth, although there might be rain ; but the question is of no consequence, for the rainbow was “set” or *appointed*, as the *token* of God’s covenant. This sign was at once beautiful and appropriate ; for as it appears only in time of rain, at the falling of which, the minds of men who had so recently escaped the deluge might be disturbed, under the apprehension of a second flood, it quelled their fears. When the Jews behold the rainbow, they bless God ; a custom in which we should do well to imitate them ; and especially since the same sign, at once so mild and so majestic, not only assures us of preservation from the “plague of immoderate waters,” and of the succession of seasons, but has become an evangelical symbol also. There was “a rainbow about the throne,” both in the visions of Ezekiel and St. John ; the pledge to us of the retiring storm of the Divine anger, and the breaking forth of the light of his countenance. “When thou lookest upon the rainbow, praise Him that made it ; very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof ; it compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle, and the hands of the Most High have bended it.” Ecclesiasticus xlvi. 11, 12.

A.—The intemperance of Noah is a great blot in the character of so distinguished a Patriarch.

B.—And the recording of the failings of good men in the Old Testament, is a great proof of the veracity and honesty of the sacred writers. It is always to be remembered that these instances are not recorded as *examples*, but as *admonitions*, the moral of which is expressed by St. Paul in his own admirable manner : “ Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

A.—How does it appear that the prophetic malediction pronounced by Noah upon Ham, and the benediction of Shem and Japheth, have been accomplished ?

B.—They related chiefly to *the posterity* of each. As to Ham, the curse being laid upon Canaan his son, rather than upon himself, shows that it was limited to the Canaanites, and did not extend farther. These were subjected by the Israelites, the descendants of Shem ; and the Tyrians and Carthaginians who were also Canaanites, by the Greeks and Romans, the descendants of Japheth. The malediction was however pre-scient of their wickedness ; for until the iniquity of the Canaanites came to the “ full,” they were not subject to it. Joshua did not invade Canaan until eight hundred years after the delivery of this prophecy ;—so slow is God to anger, and yet so mindful of his own word ! The blessing of Shem intimates that the Lord would be “ his God,” in a particular manner ; and, accordingly, the Church of God was established for many generations among his posterity ; and of him, “ according to

the flesh, Christ came.” The “enlargement” of Japheth has been fulfilled by his descendants possessing “all Europe, the Lesser Asia, Media, part of Armenia, Iberia, Albania, and those vast regions to the north which anciently the Scythians inhabited, now the Tartars.” His dwelling in the tents of Shem was fulfilled when the Greeks and Romans subdued Judea, and other countries of Asia belonging to Shem; and more recently by the conquests of European powers in the East.

A.—The peopling of the earth by the descendants of Noah must be a valuable and curious part of the Mosaic history.

B.—As an historical record it is inestimable. It opens to us that impenetrable mystery,—the origin of nations; for we should otherwise have been left to the fables of heathen writers, who profess to make us profoundly wise by the information that one nation sprung from stones, another from a tree, a third from dragons’ teeth, and so on. Add to this, the investigations of the most learned men have served to confirm this account. Sir W. Jones has satisfactorily traced the origin of all the people of the earth to the three roots, SHEM, HAM, and JAPHETH.

A.—May we learn from Moses, who was the first man that assumed sovereign power? and which was the first kingdom?

B.—Nimrod was the first man to whom kingly power is ascribed; and he appears to have substituted a sovereignty acquired by vigour, boldness, and conquest, for the paternal or patriarchal form of government.

A.—Did he derive his appellation of “a mighty hunter,” from his hunting men, which has been the great employ of all celebrated conquerors?

B.—From hunting animals; but the heroes of antiquity were trained up in the chase, which, as practised in the East, and in those early ages, you must not confound with the exploits of our European gentry, who valiantly encounter a hare, a fox, or, at most, a stag. The tiger-hunts of modern India are better pictures of the ancient venatical exploits of Nimrod; and as formidable wild beasts were the animals to be destroyed, and that both for the safety of the inhabitants, and the extension of cultivation into the rude country infested with them, a hunting party was usually composed of considerable numbers of armed men. Among these, Nimrod, from his strength, activity, and courage, appears to have gained influence, and to have made use of it for the purpose of collecting followers for the founding of an empire; no doubt, at the expense of the independence of many of the primitive tribes, who were thus coerced into submission. The Chaldean astronomers honoured his memory by placing him among the stars, where he still shines as the constellation Orion, at least upon your celestial globe, invested with the attributes of a huntsman. Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh are said to be “the beginning of his kingdom;” but, not content with these, “he went out into Assyria,” as the margin reads it, which belonged to the children of Shem, and built the celebrated Nineveh, and by this conquest laid the foundation of the Assyrian empire.

A.—When the language of men was confounded, are we to understand that a number of totally new languages took the place of the one primitive tongue?

B.—As this was unnecessary to accomplish the Divine purpose, we may presume that nothing more was done than to produce a difference of pronunciation and dialect, which would render the different tribes as unintelligible to each other as those who speak French to those who only understand Italian or Spanish; although all these arise out of the Latin.

A.—Was the primitive language lost?

B.—This is the opinion of that great linguist, Sir W. Jones; but others have disputed in favour of the Hebrew being the primitive language of mankind. All that we can say is, that it does not appear to have been necessary to destroy the original language in order to effect the purpose of the miracle, which was to oblige the people to disperse, when employed in building a great city and tower to prevent their being “scattered abroad upon the face of the earth.” For this reason it is probable that the primitive tongue continued to be spoken by some one nation.

A.—Then it was plainly the will of God, that men should form different states or political societies?

B.—Clearly so; and the means of accomplishing this was most effectual; for, as the learned Mede observes, “the proper effect of the plurality of tongues is to sort men into a plurality of societies.”

A.—Was language originally a human invention, or taught to man by God?

B.—Adam in Paradise heard God speak in language, and he understood it. He must therefore have been endowed with that gift at his creation.

A.—I might have thought of that ; but I was led to the question by remembering that I had somewhere seen a conjecture how men would begin to form language from its first elements.

B.—There have been theorists who have advocated the notion of the human invention of language. The most profound of these was the Abbé de Brosses ; but even he confesses that men must have existed a long time, must have acquired general ideas, have formed themselves into societies, and have undertaken designs in common, before they could form regular words out of the inarticulate sounds and cries of nature.

A.—Surely this is most absurd ; for how could they establish society, form laws, agree on forms of government, invent a common system of religion, and agree on the plans necessary to execute works in common, without any expressive medium of communication ?

B.—This is only one among the follies of the wise when they would be “wise above what is written.” So that they often remind us of that passage : “They have rejected the word of the Lord ; and what wisdom is there in them ?”

## CONVERSATION VII.

CALL OF ABRAHAM.—ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.—MELCHIZEDECK.—ISHMAEL.—BURIAL PLACES.—ESAU.—JACOB.—BLESSING OF THE TWELVE TRIBES.

A.—Do you not regard the call of Abraham as, after the creation, the fall of man, and the deluge, the next grand leading event in the history of Moses?

B.—So truly so, that Moses devotes to it nineteen chapters of the Book of Genesis. It demands your attention in various views.

A.—Is not the first, that it exhibits a picture of ancient manners?

B.—The most ancient picture of them; and although this is the lowest consideration under which it ought to be regarded, it is neither uninteresting nor uninstructive. UR, of which Abraham was a native, was in the plains of Chaldea; HARAN, or *Charan*, was to the westward; and here he received that Divine injunction which he so implicitly, and in so noble an exercise of true faith, obeyed, to depart to a country “which he knew not of;” but which God promised “to show him.” The migrations of Abraham and his sons show the manner in which the earth was gradually covered with people. In those ages some cities had been built, and the country, to some extent about them, cultivated; but wide spaces of unoccupied land intervened between. A part of society following therefore the pastoral life, led forth their flocks, and, in large family tribes, of which the

parent was the head, uniting both the sovereign power and the priesthood in himself, and with a train of servants attached to the tribe by hereditary ties, pitched their camps wherever a fertile and unappropriated district offered them pasture. A few of these nomadic tribes appear to have made the circuit of the same region, seldom going far from their native seats; which would probably have been the case with Abraham, had he not received the call of God to depart to a distant country. Others, more bold, followed the track of rivers, and the sweep of fertile vallies, and at length some built cities, and formed settlements in those distant regions; whilst others, either from attachment to their former mode of life, or from necessity, continued in their pastoral occupations, and followed the supplies afforded for their flocks by the still-expanding regions of the fertile earth. Wars and violences, droughts, famines, and the constant increase of population, continued to impel these innumerable, but, at first, small, streams of men into still more distant regions. Those who settled on the sea-coasts began to use that element both for supplying themselves with a new species of food, and as a medium of communication by vessels with other countries, for the interchange of such commodities as their own lands afforded with those offered by maritime states, more or less distant. Thus were laid the foundations of *commerce*; and thus the maritime cities were gradually rendered opulent and powerful. Colonies were in time transported from them by means of their ships, and settled on the coasts of still more distant

and fertile countries. Thus the migrations of the three primitive families proceeded from the central regions of Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria ; and in succession they established far distant communities ;—the Phenicians, Arabians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Lybians southwards ;—the Persians, Indians, and Chinese eastwards ;—the Scythians, Celts, and Tartars northwards ;—and the Goths, Greeks, and Latins, even as far as the Peruvians and Mexicans of South America, and the Indians of North America, westwards.

A.—The modern pastoral Arabians appear to have preserved some features of the manners of the patriarchal shepherds.

B.—But without their intelligence and dignity. Abraham is seen as the sovereign, or **EMIR**, of his tribe ; but his rule is without tyranny or haughtiness, and his servants submit without servility. Although secondary wives were allowed, Sarah preserves her superiority of rank and authority over them ; and she is the companion of her lord, and shares his counsels. There is no degradation of the wife observable. The religion too of the family is common to all ; and the polite and courteous behaviour, of which instances often break incidentally through the narrative, exhibit refinement of manners, in interesting connexion with simplicity, and pastoral occupations.

A.—You observed that these views, however interesting, were of inferior importance to others connected with the call of Abraham.

B.—This was a great moral event, designed to pre-

serve the true religion, by special interposition, in one family, and to bear witness to it among other nations now rapidly sinking into fatal errors and base idolatries.

A.—God condescended to make a covenant with Abraham : What was the import of it ?

B.—That He would “bless him greatly ;”—make him “the father of many nations ;” which promise, as St. Paul teaches, includes his spiritual seed, as well as his natural descendants ;—that He would give “to him and to his seed the land of Canaan,” in which was included the promise of the heavenly inheritance, of which Canaan was, from that time, made the standing type to the faithful ;—that he and his posterity should be “the people” of God, or his visible Church on earth ;—and that “in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed ;” which not only meant that he should have issue, and that the Seed of the woman, the Deliverer of man, for whom they looked, should be one of his descendants ; but that “all nations,” believers of all nations, should be justified by faith in that Seed ; that is, by faith in Christ. For so St. Paul says expressly, “And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Heathen by faith, preached before the Gospel to Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

A.—And upon this explicit declaration of the doctrine of the justification of guilty man before God by faith in Christ, Abraham himself “believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness :” Does this mean that he was justified ?

B.—Certainly ; and it may be well for you to remem-

ber, that *the counting of righteousness to any one* ; *the imputation of faith for righteousness* ; *the non-imputation of sin* ; *the covering of sin* ; *justification*, and *remission of sins*, are phrases which, in Scripture, mean in substance the same thing ; that is, the pardon of sin, through faith in the atonement of Christ.

A.—Was not this doctrine known previously ?

B.—Yes, from the beginning, as I have already stated to you. It received an illustrious attestation in the case of Abel, who, after exhibiting his *faith* in the appointed sacrifice for sin, received *the witness that he was righteous* ; that is, he received a testimony to his justification before God, by the acceptance of his sacrifice. This was, no doubt, *visibly vouchsafed* for the instruction of the old world in this great and fundamental doctrine ; and the justification of Abraham was a republication and confirmation of it in the new. It was solemnly, so to speak, committed to Abraham, as one of those doctrines which his family was to preserve, and which he was to transmit to the future Church of which he was made the spiritual *father* and *example*.

A.—Then this was not a private transaction between him and God ?

B.—Abraham stood in a public relation ; he was God's "Prophet," and "the father of the faithful." The covenant of grace was made with him and his believing descendants ; and the rite of circumcision was the seal or sacrament of that covenant, and declared the doctrine, and offered the grace of the covenant, among all the tribes who proceeded from Abraham.

A.—Why did not Abraham settle in some one place in the land of Canaan ?

B.—He and Isaac and Jacob were appointed to wander about in it, “dwelling in tents,” and not in cities, in order, it would seem, in the presence of all the nations around them, to bear the testimony of their faith as to a future world of blessedness ; for thus, as St. Paul argues, “they declared plainly,” that they sought “a better country, even an heavenly.” Have you marked the circumstances which gave so eminent a character to the faith of Abraham ?

A.—Yes ; and I have often been affected by them ;—his trust in God’s care when he migrated with his whole family and property to an unknown land, exposed to the violence of an age which had become restless and predatory ;—his entire belief that a son should be preternaturally born to him, because God had promised it ;—and, to crown the whole, his willingness to offer up this long-desired and tenderly-beloved child at the command of God, believing that God “would raise him from the dead,” and that he who had been given by miracle, could by miracle be restored, and would be so restored rather than the promise of God should fail.

B.—Such is the force of that grand principle of faith in God, which is equally enjoined upon us as upon the Patriarchs. You perceive also from the case of Abraham, that a true faith necessarily produces obedience, and that it is the great instrument of our sanctification.

A.—Did not Abraham violate truth when he induced Sarah to represent herself as his sister ?

B.—He concealed truth only, in a case where he was under no obligation to declare it ; for Sarah was his half sister, the daughter of his father, though not of his mother ; those near connexions being allowed in early times. There might, however, be a fault in his trusting the matter rather to his own management, than to the care of God.

A.—Was not Melchizedeck a Canaanitish king ?

B.—He was, and Priest of the true God ; consequently, he was at the head of a people who still preserved the primitive faith, and publicly confessed God amidst the other Canaanitish nations who had become corrupt and idolatrous.

A.—Was it for this reason that Abraham so greatly honoured him ?

B.—For this ; and also that Melchizedeck seems to have been specially commissioned by God to be “ his Priest ” in that region. Abraham was a Priest too ; but there was something in the case of Melchizedeck, which made him “ greater than Abraham,” as the Apostle Paul shows.

A.—Did Abraham know that he was a type of the Christ ?

B.—It is not unlikely that he had some intimation of this.

A.—In what did his typical character consist ?

B.—First, in his titles, “ King of Righteousness,” which is the meaning of his name ; and “ King of Salem,” or peace. Second, in the omission of all mention of his genealogy in Scripture, which shows that

he was not one of a line of Priests, not an hereditary Priest, and that the *order* of his priesthood was therefore special and peculiar to himself, as was that of our Lord.

A.—Has there not been a striking accomplishment of the prophecy respecting Ishmael, the son of Hagar, Abraham's secondary wife ?

B.—A very striking one, which remains exhibited to this day. His seed was to be “ exceedingly multiplied ; ” and the Arabs are still a very numerous people. He was to be “ a wild man ; ” that is, to live in a rambling and unsettled state, which the Arabs do to the present hour, for it is to be observed, that such prophecies chiefly respect the descendants of the persons who were the subjects of them. His hand was to be “ against every man ; ” and the Arabs are universal marauders ; and “ every man's hand against him,” which has been fulfilled in the numerous attempts made by the most powerful states to extirpate them, but in vain ; for he has ever dwelt, and still “ dwells, in the presence of all his brethren.” The Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman empires have passed away ; the kingdoms of Syria, and Israel, and Judah, and Egypt, are utterly extinct ; but the Arabs remain in their native seats, free and independent as ever, and preserve unimpaired an exact resemblance to the first descendants of the son of Hagar.

A.—Do any of the ancients allude to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah ?

B.—Yes ; the Jewish Prophets ; Josephus, the

Jewish historian ; and several heathen writers, especially the Latin annalist Tacitus, who says, that those cities “ were burnt by the stroke of thunder-bolts from heaven.” The country itself has always borne the traces of this fearful display of the Divine vengeance ; which has been remarked by all travellers ancient and modern. A recent geographer says, “ The valley of the Jordan offers many traces of volcanoes ; the bituminous and sulphurous water of Lake Asphaltus, the lavas and pumice thrown out on its banks, and the warm bath of Taborieh, show that this valley has been the theatre of a fire not yet extinguished.”

A.—The death of Sarah, and the negotiation of Abraham with the children of Heth, or the Hittites, for a burial-place, are related in a very touching and graphic manner, and seem to place us in the midst of the scene.

B.—This is the case with all the narratives of Moses ; and there is so much truth to nature, to the age, and to the characters themselves, that they are felt at once to be genuine. Abraham refused to bring his dead into “ the choice of the sepulchres ” of the children of Heth, although so honourably offered to him. He sought a family burial-place, according to the interesting custom of that and subsequent ages. These were usually formed out of rocks, the excavations being supported by pillars, and the ground around planted with trees. There the family union was continued, and successive generations were “ gathered to their fathers.” The negotiation on this occasion was, you will per-

ceive, carried on “at the gate” of the city, where, from the most ancient times, the elders met to hear complaints, administer justice, make conveyances of titles and estates, and to transact other public affairs. Thus we read of “elders in the gate ;” Deut. xxii. 15 ; and of him that “ reproveth and rebuketh in the gate.” Isaiah xxix. 21. The Ottoman Court is likewise in our times called *The Porte*, from the distribution of justice, and other public business carried on at its *gates*.

A.—What was the sin of Esau in selling his birth-right ?

B.—It was the privilege of the first-born to be the head and priest of the family ; and in this case it also included the promise of the Messiah to be born in that line, unless altered by a sovereign act of God. Esau despised therefore all these religious considerations, to gratify a capricious appetite ; for there was no real necessity in the case, and he is therefore made, by St. Paul, the exemplar of all “ profane persons,” who for fleshly gratifications despise spiritual things.

A.—But was the conduct of Jacob justifiable ?

B.—Not at all ; for, although the birthright was intended for him in the Divine counsels, he took his cause out of the hand of God, and thereby sinned, and was afterwards punished by many and great afflictions.

A.—Jacob served Laban seven years for Rachel : Was that the method of obtaining wives ?

B.—Unless the suitor had valuable presents to make. But Jacob having nothing to offer, he gave his labour

to Laban. This custom still remains ; for Burckhardt, in his Travels in Syria, remarks : “ I once met with a young man who had served eight years for his food only ; at the end of that period, he obtained the daughter of his master in marriage, for whom he would otherwise have had to pay 7 or 800 piastres.”

A.—What was taught to Jacob by his dream of the ladder, and of the angels of God ascending and descending upon it ?

B.—It was an emblem of that intercourse between heaven and earth, which is established by Divine Providence, whose angelic ministers are always employed in behalf of them that fear Him. It declared to Jacob, “ that the man who was under the custody and protection of God, wanted not company in a wilderness, nor security in danger.”\*

A.—The wrestling of Jacob with an angel is a remarkable scene ; was it real or visionary ?

B.—That it was not a vision, is plain from the lameness to which Jacob was ever afterwards subject. The appearance was one of those temporary manifestations of the Son of God in human form, which occasionally were vouchsafed in those ages. Jacob was evidently impressed with this belief from the beginning of the transaction, as appears from his seeking a “ blessing ” of the angel so earnestly. The endeavours of this mysterious Being to get loose from the grasp of the Patriarch, were designed to call forth Jacob’s earnest

\* Bishop Hall.

desire for this blessing ; and it was at last granted to his determined perseverance, in order to encourage all men in all ages, to “pray and not faint.” As the blessing which Jacob obtained was not apparently temporal, we are to conclude that it was a *spiritual* one, an assurance of the Divine favour and reconciliation at a time when his afflictions and dangers had brought all his sins and failings painfully to his remembrance.

A.—The account of Joseph’s persecutions, exaltation, and reconciliation is so plain, and delivered with such touching simplicity and pathos, than one can scarcely interrupt the narrative, by asking any questions. I wish, however, to be informed, what might be the great design of Providence in bringing the Abrahamic family into Egypt ?

B.—That they might multiply in numbers, and so be raised into a people powerful enough to occupy the land from which the Canaanites were to be expelled ; and also, that God might, by miraculous interposition, assert his own Divinity in Egypt, and humble the idols in which the besotted people of that land trusted.

A.—The blessings which Jacob pronounced upon his sons, before his death, are no doubt to be regarded as predictions.

B.—They are so in the most illustrious sense. They point out emblematically the portions of the land of Canaan which each tribe should occupy ; or the characters by which it should be distinguished ; or the pursuits, whether of husbandry, pasturage, or commerce, which they should follow ; and they at once

show that he was endued with a prophetic spirit, and express in the strongest manner his faith in the promises made to Abraham and renewed to himself. Thus he was one of those who “died in the faith.” So calmly and with so much moral majesty terminated the “pilgrimage” of this venerable Patriarch, the faults of whose youth were indeed righteously visited, but, by sanctified affliction, purged away. The mild, benevolent, and truly fatherly character of Jacob, is greatly to be admired He was taken up to Canaan, and buried “with his fathers,” in the burial-place purchased by Abraham of the sons of Heth.

A.—Is not the prophecy, contained in his blessing pronounced upon Judah, considered of importance as one of the proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus?

B.—You refer to the prediction, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until *Shiloh* come.”

A.—The same ; and may I ask, whether *Shiloh* is the Messiah ?

B.—This is allowed by Jewish, as well as by Christian, commentators ; and the prediction states that Judah should continue a distinct tribe, with rulers and judges of its own, until Messiah should come ; but that after his coming, the independent authority and tribelship of Judah should pass away. Mark, then, the force and truth of this prediction ; for although the ten tribes which constituted the kingdom of Israel never returned, as a political body, after they were carried away into Assyria, Judah was restored after a captivity of seventy

years in Babylon ; and the political state of the Jews was revived. Our Lord was born in the days of Herod, the last Prince who had any claim to be called independent ; so that the sceptre had not then departed. But the power of the Jews had begun rapidly to decline ; and in a short time after his death, Judah was wholly annihilated as a political state, and continues without power and authority to this day : Nay, the tribes are so confounded as not to be distinguished. How surely is the future known to God !

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## CONVERSATION VIII.

PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION OF RELIGION.—THE ISRA-  
ELITES IN EGYPT.—MOSES.—EGYPTIAN MAGICIANS.  
—THE PASSOVER.

A.—WHAT means the word *Exodus* ?

B.—The Exodus is the *departure* of the children of Israel from Egypt,—an event which terminates what may be called the Patriarchal Dispensation, and henceforward exhibits the visible Church of God under a new aspect ; associated with a powerful nation, with a political character, and under peculiar laws ; of whom God condescended to become the head, or sovereign ; and sustaining its part in the struggles and changes of the kingdoms and empires which surrounded it. But in taking leave of the ages before Moses, it may be useful

to you to remark how truly all the principles of Christianity were recognized among the pious of those early times. True religion, under all its dispensations, is thus proved to be the same ; differing in circumstances, and in degrees of light, but eminently ONE,—a revelation of the same truths, and of the same hopes.

A.—Favour me with an illustration of this important point.

B.—Through all these the earliest times, we see the holy Patriarchs, who were inspired teachers of truth, the Prophets of God, and the Priests of their respective tribes, consenting in the belief of the doctrine of the unity of God ;—a distinction of Divine Persons in the one Godhead ;—the creation and conservation of all things by God ;—a general and a particular providence ;—a Divine law, fixing the distinctions of right and wrong ;—the fall and the corruption, the guilt and the danger, of man ;—the doctrine of atonement through the voluntary and vicarious sufferings of the Seed of the woman ;—the necessity of penitence, and of faith in that atonement, in order to forgiveness ;—the obligation and efficacy of prayer ;—the doctrine of direct Divine influence ;—practical righteousness ;—the accountability of man ;—the immortality of the soul ;—the resurrection of the body ;—and a heavenly and unfading inheritance. These were the leading principles of the true religion as received in the families of Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. They were held, no doubt, by Melchizedeck, and that branch of the Church of God over which he ministered ; and perhaps,

also, by other families and communities in more distant places, notwithstanding the rapid progress which superstition and idolatry had made in the world. The insulated Book of Job is presumptive of this; for it manifestly belongs to the patriarchal age. In this Book allusions are made to almost all these doctrines, together with that of Satanic agency, and the resurrection of the body; whilst it generally confirms the important truths, that the afflictions of good men are the instruments of moral correction; and that neither is the prosperity of the wicked any proof of God's disregard to human conduct, nor the afflictions of the righteous any argument against the efficacy of prayer, or the interest which good men have in the Divine favour.

A.—Thus, then, I see that when religion is grounded upon human authority and opinion, it is ever changing, running into the prurience of superstition, or narrowing up itself within the limits of a withering scepticism; whilst that which is from God is like himself,—“the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

B.—And therefore affords a firm foundation for trust and hope.

A.—But to proceed to that illustrious event,—the deliverance of the descendants of Jacob from Egypt: What might be the motive with the Egyptian Government for the oppression of a people they had so long favoured?

B.—Probably political jealousy and fear;—feelings which operated upon those cruel dispositions which are always found in idolatrous countries. Previously to

the settlement of the Israelites in Egypt, the Egyptians had suffered a calamitous invasion from some Asiatic tribes, whom they called “Shepherds;” that is, tribes forming some of those nomadic and migratory communities of which we have spoken. These possessed themselves of Lower Egypt for a considerable space of time, and committed great cruelties. They had been but recently expelled when Joseph came into power; and the land of Goshen, probably left unoccupied by their expulsion, was assigned to the sons of Jacob, as favourable to the grazing of cattle. In that most fertile district the Israelites multiplied exceedingly under the special blessing of God; and the Pharaoh then reigning might think that a second Shepherd invasion would be the result, although their peaceable demeanour gave no ground for the alarm.

A.—Jealousy and political fear are always cruel; and I can easily conceive the sad state of oppression to which the Israelites were reduced, when, taken from their rural occupations, they were obliged to undergo all kinds of servile and laborious work, under severe task-masters; and when the great political object was to waste down their numbers by cruel and harrassing treatment.

B.—Yet, by the Divine blessing, they multiplied; which was the reason for that cruel decree against the Hebrew infants, so outraging to humanity, and which, as cold-blooded murderers, rendered Pharaoh and his people, who appear to have gone into his views, fit objects of the Divine vengeance.

A.—Moses was born during the operation of this

sanguinary decree ; and there is something very affecting in the account of his preservation.

B.—It is not merely affecting, but deeply instructive. That his parents hid him for three months, without being “afraid of the King’s commandment,” was a noble instance of the faith which relies upon God ; and defies the power of the mightiest of men. It was in the same faith, no doubt, that they exposed the child upon the river Nile, in an ark of rushes ; and it was rewarded. The child was found by Pharaoh’s daughter, who, affected by the tears of the exposed infant, had compassion upon him.

A.—This was an instance of the superior sensibility of woman.

B.—True ; but her heart was doubtless touched with this strong affection to Moses by the secret hand of God, whose special providence was here, in several respects, remarkably displayed.

A.—One instance doubtless was, the appointment of his own mother to be the nurse of Moses.

B.—Truly so ; for, by that, the all-important point of his instruction in the true religion of his fathers was secured, and that too by the tuition of a mother of eminent piety ; as her faith, before mentioned, shows. The other was, that, in addition to this, he was trained up, by a courtly education, “in the wisdom of the Egyptians,” and in the practice of governing men, to be the ruler and leader of the people he was appointed to deliver.

A.—Was his killing the Egyptian an unlawful act ?

B.—His espousing the cause of his oppressed people “as the people of God,” was a religious act, and an instance of lofty and generous patriotism. For this he renounced his adoption by Pharaoh’s daughter, and the “pleasures” and “riches of Egypt;” and having had some intimation, probably from heaven, of his being their destined deliverer, he was led at this time to go out “among his brethren,” secretly to prepare them to resist their oppressors. The lawfulness of the act of killing the Egyptian, who was smiting a Hebrew, and probably intended to inflict a mortal blow, depends upon circumstances which, as they are not stated, prevent us from forming an opinion for or against his conduct. It was evidently not an act of private resentment or revenge, and therefore not of malice. It was done also, as appears from the story, in the presence of other Hebrews, although no Egyptian was near; and as one of them reproached Moses with it afterwards, he found that they were not ripe for the assertion of their own liberty; and that he himself was not safe among a people already debased in spirit by long-continued slavery.

A.—In Midian, where he followed a shepherd’s life for many years, he appears to have given up the hope of delivering his people.

B.—At least, having attempted it once, before God’s time, and failed, he waited for special direction. This he received, when God spake unto him out of the burning bush.

A.—The account of this solemn transaction, with the miraculous powers with which Moses was invested,

appears to have convinced *the elders* of Israel that he was divinely commissioned to effect their deliverance from Egypt ; and I suppose that it was in their name, as the natural rulers of the people, that he demanded their liberation from Pharaoh.

B.—Yes ; and, more than that, he made the demand in the name of the true God, whose threatenings against them as delivered by Moses made the Egyptians resort for succour to the gods and demons whom they worshipped : and thus was brought on that grand contest with the idols of Egypt and their votaries, which issued in the loftiest demonstration of the supremacy and glory of JEHOVAH. By the mighty plagues he inflicted, he was “exalted above all the gods of Egypt,” who had no power to deliver those who trusted in them out of his hand. “The pride of the Egyptians was humbled ; their most sacred prejudices wounded ; the Nile was contaminated by blood ; their dwellings polluted by loathsome reptiles ; their cleanly persons defiled by vermin ; their pure air had swarmed with troublesome insects ; their cattle had perished ; their bodies broken out with a filthy disease ; their early harvest had been destroyed by the hail ; the latter harvest by the locusts ; an awful darkness enveloped them for three days ;” \* and then in one night of horror, “all the first-born in the land of Egypt were smitten,” “and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.” Finally came the miraculous passage of

\* Milman.

the Israelites through the Red Sea, and the destruction of the obdurate Pharaoh and his host. If by such a demonstration of the sole Divinity of Jehovah, and so signal a punishment of an idolatrous people, the infatuated passion for the setting up of idols was not checked among the surrounding nations, these events at least left them without excuse.

A.—Was not Pharaoh's heart hardened by God?

B.—Yes; but not till he had wilfully hardened it himself, as the history will show you. And in all ages, men who have wilfully and perseveringly resisted conviction, have been *given up* to the hardness and impenitence of their hearts; which is what is meant by the Lord's hardening Pharaoh's heart.

A.—Were the imitations of the signs of Moses by the Egyptian magicians done by manual dexterity or by diabolical assistance?

B.—Probably by both, as the case might require. Sleight-of-hand has been carried in the East to a very high degree of skill in all ages; and was cultivated by the pagan priests in order to impose upon the multitude by "lying wonders;" mechanical arts and contrivances were also employed by them for the same purpose; and, to a certain extent, diabolical agency was probably permitted. Idolatrous countries, you are to recollect, are places where, in an emphatic sense, "Satan has his seat."

A.—We may then conclude, that, in the wisdom of God, such signs were first wrought by Moses as they could best imitate; for though the imitation was very

imperfect, it was sufficient to convince a people ready to embrace any delusion in favour of religious error. But when it was manifest that they had exhausted all their magical or mechanical resources, such wonders followed as even constrained them to acknowledge “the finger of God.”

B.—And thus the discomfiture of the Egyptian priesthood with all the auxiliaries they could command, whether of magicians or demons, was rendered the more illustrious and indubitable, both for the instruction of the Israelites and of all mankind.

A.—Why was the Passover instituted on the eve of the destruction of the first-born of Egypt, and of the deliverance of Israel?

B.—This was a most important institution, considered merely as a proof of the occurrence of these great events to future ages. As an annual festival, it has always been observed by the whole body of the Jews even to this day; and its origin can only be accounted for by allowing it to have taken place at the time, and under the circumstances, of its first alleged appointment. For if the first-born of Egypt were not destroyed, and those of the Israelites preserved, and if they did not upon this march out of Egypt, and pass dry shod through the sea, it would not have been possible for any man to have persuaded a whole nation that this had happened to them, any more than to persuade the people of London that they had walked dry shod over the Thames on a certain day, and to institute an annual festival in commemoration of the fact.

A.—Clearly not; and therefore the festival proves the historical fact.

B.—But it had a higher intention. It was one of the ancient types of Christ. Hence, says the Apostle Paul, “Christ our PASSOVER is sacrificed for us.” It was a solemn renewal of the patriarchal doctrine, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission;” since it was the interposition of the sprinkled blood upon their door-posts which alone turned aside the stroke of the destroying angel; and the act, too, of sprinkling the blood upon the posts of their doors, was an *act of faith* on the part of the Israelites. Here, then, we have still the three grand doctrines,—substitution of the innocent for the guilty,—the shedding of vicarious blood,—and *faith* as the means of interesting men in it.

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## CONVERSATION IX.

PUBLICATION OF THE LAW.—SACRED BOOKS.—DESIGN OF THE MOSAIC INSTITUTE.—DECALOGUE.—TYPES.—THE CEREMONIAL LAW.—JEWISH POLITICAL LAW.—TEMPORAL SANCTIONS.—PROPHECIES OF MOSES.—SLAVERY.—PROSPEROUS PERIODS.

A.—PASSING over matters in this history, for an explanation of which I can resort to commentators, may I ask what were the chief purposes of so solemn a publication of the Law of God from Mount Sinai?

B.—The reason of this did not terminate in the Jews of that generation, but respected that people in future times, and indeed the whole race of men.

A.—In what way?

B.—Then, for the first time, were the revelations of God's will to men given in a *written form*. The Ten Commandments were inscribed by the finger of God upon tables of stone; the other numerous commandments and ordinances which were also promulgated from Mount Sinai were written by Moses in a book; and, along with the historical writings of Moses, were kept with religious care, as containing at once the history, the genealogies, the religion, and the ecclesiastical and political legislation of the nation.

A.—This was the more necessary I conceive, as the laws of God had become more numerous, the life of man shorter, and the state of society more tumultuous and variable; so that tradition, which, as having passed hitherto through so few hands, from Shem the son of Noah, through Abraham to Moses, was a safe mode of transmitting truth, had become inadequate to its accurate preservation.

B.—An important pledge was also given for the uncorrupted preservation of these sacred records, by their not being lodged with private persons, but intimately and inseparably connected with the public institutions of a whole nation, rendering constant reference to them necessary; and thus keeping them in the sight, and within the knowledge, of the people at large, from age to age. For at stated seasons the law was publicly

read before all the people of Israel; and the originals were reserved in the ark. Every king was required to write out a copy of the law for his own constant use; and the people who were commanded "to teach their children diligently," must also have had copies. It is likewise an important fact, in proof of the exact preservation of the Sacred Books, that the Samaritan Pentateuch, that is, the five Books of Moses in the Samaritan or old Hebrew or Phenician character, used for ages by the rival Samaritans, agrees, with but few variations of an unimportant kind, the effect evidently of transcription, with the Jewish copy which is written in the Chaldee character. The reverence too of the Jews from the earliest times for their sacred writings was another guarantee for their integrity; for, according to the testimony of both Philo and Josephus, they would suffer any torments rather than change a single point or iota in them; and, accordingly, though they are charged so severely by our Lord with making void the law by their traditions, they are never charged with corrupting or falsifying the letter of it. To the same sanctuary of the ark were consigned, as they were successively produced, all those historical and prophetical Books which were written from the time of Joshua to David. Solomon lodged these along with the ark in the temple which he had built, and added the inspired productions of his own pen. To these were added the writings of the Prophets who lived before the captivity; for that these copies were taken to Babylon, and not destroyed with the temple, is clear from Daniel, who

refers to them, Daniel ix. 11. During the captivity, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the Prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel, were added to the sacred collection ; then the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, not by private authority, but by the Jewish Church.

A.—Since all the Prophets inveigh bitterly against the sins of the Jews, is not this a strong presumption that their writings must have been received at first as divinely inspired, or otherwise the national pride of the Jews would have buried them in oblivion ?

B.—True ; but we have more than this presumptive evidence, however strong ; for we know from the catalogue of Josephus, that the books of our Old Testament are the same as those received by the Jews before the time of Christ ; and both Christ and his Apostles speak of them by way of distinction from all other writings, as *The Scriptures* ; and declare that they were given “by inspiration of God ;” so that the same arguments which prove the Messiahship of Christ, and the inspiration of the Apostles, prove consequentially the truth, the uncorruptness, and the authority of all the Books of the Old Testament ; which, since their time could not, on account of the vigilance of Christians, be corrupted by the Jews ; who, however, to do them justice, cannot be charged with this crime.

A.—A standing written revelation, in which every one may read the will of God, and by which every doctrine may be tried, is indeed an unspeakable advantage ; but we have digressed from the leading design of the law given from Mount Sinai.

B.—If you include both the republished moral law, and the other parts of the Mosaic institute, the design was fourfold :—*To record the moral laws under which the Jews and all men are placed to the end of time ;—to exhibit, in a more perfect system of types, the grace of the evangelical dispensation, which Messiah was to introduce in its perfected form ;—to keep the Israelites from the idolatrous practices of other nations ;—and to provide for their civil government.*

A.—On each of these points I beg for information.

B.—As to the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, it is impossible to conceive a more perfect system of morality founded upon religion, as all true morality must be ; and, when rightly understood, it is as much a law for the principles and the heart, as for the external conduct. It requires THE ONE ONLY AND TRUE GOD to be taken as our God ; that is, not only to be acknowledged, but to be worshipped, reverenced, trusted in, and supremely loved, to the exclusion of every other being, real or imaginary. It forbids the use of all IMAGES and LIKENESSES of invisible things, for purposes of worship, or assistance in worship ; and thus enjoins a purely spiritual service, free from those superstitions which have been uniformly found to debase the mind, and alienate the heart from God. It forbids the impious, profane, or light use of the NAME OF GOD, either by false swearing, or in common conversation, and thus reserves that “glorious and fearful name,” for those solemn and religious appeals by which judicial oaths are made binding upon

the consciences of men, and influential upon the peace and good faith of society. It enjoins the observance of THE SABBATH,—that institution so important to religion, and to benevolence. It surrounds the PATERNAL RELATION with sanctity and honour ; in which may also be included the reverence and submission we owe to superiors and governors. It guards against MURDER and the malignant passions which lead to it ; against ADULTERY, or all the sins of the flesh, requiring in this respect a perfect purity of thought, and inward chastity. It forbids all FRAUD and WRONG, and therefore enjoins a perfect righteousness and justice in all our concerns with others, securing to every one his due, of what kind soever that may be. It inhibits all FALSE ACCUSATIONS in private intercourse or in courts of law ; and thus regulates the tongue. And it lays its restraint upon all COVETOUS AND DISCONTENTED DESIRES. To these particular laws, which bear both a positive and a negative character, and are in themselves exceedingly comprehensive, we are to add those general principles in which this law is summed up, and thus rendered capable of application to every branch of religion, and to all parts of duty however particular ; such as, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength ; and thy neighbour as thyself :” And, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so even unto them :” So that no case is left unprovided for, and a beautiful and harmonious system of religion and morals is exhibited, such as no other nation ever could enact, or even con-

ceive; and the whole is enforced by the authority of God, and the sanction of death in a future state of being, as the penalty of disobedience.

A.—But if this was part of the law of the Jews as a *nation*, or in their *civil* state, was the penalty of death extended beyond the present life?

B.—The Israelites stood both in the relation of *subjects* and of *creatures* towards God; and therefore he imposed penalties which respected both this life and that which is to come. But that great and leading branch of the Mosaic law, which we call the Decalogue, was distinguished from all the other laws given to Israel by its being given *first*; and by its being written by *the finger of God* on tables of stone. The reason of this is obvious: It was a republication of God's moral law which had all along been in force, and was designed to be in force for ever; and also to show that it was not a merely municipal or political law, but the law of the Israelites as God's *creatures*, and answerable to him in the court of their conscience, and at the day of judgment.

A.—This, indeed, as I might have noticed, appears from the nature of those commands, which extended to *the thoughts and purposes* of the heart; as that which forbids covetousness, of which no cognizance therefore could be taken by the human tribunals which God established among the Jews.

B.—And this is made still more certain by the consideration that our Lord and his Apostles uniformly declare *sin* to be the transgression of *this law*, among all people; so that every transgressor, whether Jew or

Gentile, is brought thereby under the penalty of everlasting death.

A.—Does the CURSE, which was afterwards pronounced upon all who “continued not in all things written in the book of the law to do them,” lie upon all transgressors of the moral law, as well as of other parts of the Mosaic institutions?

B.—Yes ; and in its highest sense.

A.—Then, as we have all sinned against this holy law in innumerable instances, it appears to me to be a most fearful revelation.

B.—And it was accordingly delivered amidst the darkness, thunderings, fearful voices, and fires which enveloped, and issued from, the summit of Sinai. To an innocent being the law of God can only appear arrayed in an attractive “beauty of holiness ;” but to a man conscious of guilt, and who sees its tremendous maledictions hanging over his head, its revelations of holiness and justice must be terrible. They were so represented from Sinai, because they are so in truth ; for God “hateth iniquity,” and is “a consuming fire” to sinners ; and because they were intended to awaken us to a due sense of the evil of our sins, and to convince us that our case, if left to ourselves, is desperate and hopeless ; and to lead us to “smite upon our breasts” with the Publican, and to cry, “God be *merciful* to us sinners !”

A.—But you have said that the law knows no mercy, and that all “right to the tree of life” is cut off by transgression.

B.—And therefore you may recollect that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, when speaking of those who rejected the Gospel, and who sought justification by the works of the law, represents them as coming to “the mount which might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest ;” whilst Christians come to “Mount Zion,” the calm and peaceful residence of God in his character of “Jehovah, merciful and gracious, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin.”

A.—Then I am to understand that, as in the antediluvian world there was a fearful display of the terrible and offended majesty of God in the cherubim and the flame of fire placed at the east gate of the garden of Eden ; and a mild and merciful manifestation of God, in that “PRESENCE” before which the Patriarchs brought their sacrifices, or at least which was often sensibly and graciously manifested on such occasions ; so under the law there was, in contrast with the terrors of the Mount Sinai, a gracious PRESENCE of God before which the penitent brought their sacrifices, and offered up their prayers.

B.—Yes ; the cloud of the Divine presence was upon the tabernacle, or rested within the Holy of Holies ; and wherever that was, it was a pledge of mercy, and consecrated the place of sacrifice and prayer. But this leads me to the second great design of the Mosaic Institute,—to exhibit, in a more perfect system of types, the grace of that evangelical dispensation which Messiah was to introduce in its perfect form, and to seal with his own blood.

A.—This appears a large and deeply interesting subject.

B.—It is ; and, for that reason, deserves your most serious attention ; although I shall be only able to suggest topics for your future consideration.

A.—Will it not be necessary that I should previously know what is meant by a **TYPE** ?

B.—A type, in the theological sense, is a **SIGN** or *example*, **PREPARED** and **DESIGNED** by God, to *prefigure some future thing*. Of what was thus *designedly* typical in the Old Testament, the key is furnished by the New ; and by attending to its references and suggestions on this subject, we shall enter into the depths of the meaning of many parts of the Jewish Scriptures, which would otherwise be comparatively uninstructive ; whilst by confining ourselves to our infallible guides, our Lord and his Apostles, we shall avoid those fanciful interpretations which are founded upon some resemblances, more or less distant, which may exist between things which have no natural or *appointed* relation to each other, and which have rendered the writings of some good men so objectionable to every sober critic.

A.—Then you seem to hint that there have been errors in the interpretation of types, both on the side of excess and defect.

B.—And therefore the only sure guide is that which can never deceive ; that is, the New Testament, which in so many of its parts is a commentary upon the Old. Guided by that, a large and interesting scene of divinely appointed types, and symbols, set up in different ages

for the edification of the ancient Church, and for the confirmation of our faith who see them so exactly realized, will be presented to us. We shall see that the first Adam was a type of the Second in the way of *contrast*; one, by disobedience, bringing in death, the other, by obedience, bringing in life; the human race falling in one, and rising again in the other;—that the salvation of Noah in the ark by faith was “the figure” of our salvation, through “baptism,” the expression of our faith;—that Melchizedeck’s priesthood was the designed type of that of our Lord; that the justification of Abraham was the pattern of man’s justification through faith, in all ages;—that the offering and “receiving back” of Isaac was “a figure” of the death and resurrection of the beloved and only Son of God;—that as the passover was connected by Divine appointment with the salvation and rescue of Israel, so is the death of the Lamb of God our Passover, in like manner, by Divine appointment necessarily connected with our redemption from spiritual bondage;—that the Jews in the wilderness presented the instructive type of “the Church in the wilderness” of this world, on its journey to the heavenly inheritance;—that the land of Canaan was the instituted symbol of heaven to Abraham, and to all his believing descendants;—that David was the emblem of the conquering Messiah;—and that Solomon became his type, as ruling a kingdom, extending “from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth,” and which he governed in peace.

A.—Since all these instances are supported by the

authority of the New Testament, they cannot be doubted ; and they seem to suggest to me the great and impressive thought, that the redemption of man by Christ was that to which the events of all ages, and the dispensations of God to mankind, in succession, had respect ; and that they form but one grand preparation for the manifestation of Christ as the Saviour of the world.

B.—You are right ; and therefore you will be prepared to consider the Mosaic ceremonial law as a typical institution. All previous sacrifices had borne this character ; but now these evangelical adumbrations or symbols were presented to the eye of the pious and inquiring Jew and proselyte under a systematic and impressive arrangement.

A.—Be pleased to be a little more particular.

B.—The tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness for the most solemn acts of worship, you will recollect, was divided into two parts,—the holy place, and the Holy of holies. In the latter was placed the ark covered with the mercy-seat, or, in New Testament language, God's “throne of grace,” overshadowed by the cherubim ; into which none but the High Priest, in his “holy garments of glory and beauty,” entered, and that but once every year, with the blood of atonement. Sacrifices were offered every morning and evening, besides the various sacrifices brought by individuals. Every sin, whether national or individual, was expiated by sacrifices ; and once in the year there was a solemn day of national expiation. First, a bullock was slain, and the blood sprinkled by the High Priest within the

Holy of holies itself ; afterwards a goat, whose blood was sprinkled, in like manner, before the mercy-seat ; then the High Priest was to lead forth a second goat, and, confessing over him all the iniquities of the people, to put them upon the head of the goat, and to send the animal, thus bearing the sins of the people, into the wilderness ; so that in this great and annual expiation, the only day on which the High Priest entered into the Holy of holies, into the immediate presence of God, we see *confession of sin* ; *the substitution of a victim in place of the guilty* ; *a figurative transfer of sins* ; *the sprinkling of blood before the mercy-seat* ; *the bearing away of iniquity* ; and *the actual reconciliation of man to God*.

A.—Have we, then, any authority from the New Testament to consider all these singular ceremonies typical ? for to this authority you have referred me as both the guide to, and the guard of, typical interpretations.

B.—You shall yourself be the judge :—St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaking generally, calls the meats and drinks, the holy days, new moons and sabbaths of the Jews, including in the latter the services performed on those festivals, “a shadow of things to come ;” “the body” of which shadow, that which the shadow faintly exhibited, “is Christ.” Again : He calls the “sacrifices” of the tabernacle “the shadow of good things to come,” and places them in contrast, with “the *very image* of the things ;” that is, of *the good things*, just before mentioned. Of the typical *appointment* and *designation* of the tabernacle service, he dis-

courses at large in Hebrews ix : “ But into the second went the High Priest alone, once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people ; the Holy Ghost thus *signifying*” (showing by this type) “ that the way into the holiest of all, was not *YET* made manifest.” Again : He calls the tabernacle itself “ a figure,” or parable, “ for the time then present ;” and “ the things under the law, *patterns* of things in the heavens.” He designates the holy places made with hands, “ *antitypes* of the true ;” and adds, “ It was necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these” inferior sacrifices ; “ but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices.”

A.—This sufficiently proves the typical character of the Levitical ceremonial ; but what in particular was taught ?

B.—Still the ancient patriarchal doctrines, that man, the sinner, could only be reconciled to God by the shedding of blood ; and that all human hope rested upon “ the Lamb,” which God should appoint “ for a burnt offering,” and that he only could “ bear away” the sin of the world. But although the doctrine was the same, the circumstances now added to the ancient patriarchal ritual were highly illustrative. The holiest place of the tabernacle was a type of heaven ; Aaron a type of “ the High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus ;” “ the mercy-seat,” of “ the throne of grace ;” and the entrance of the High Priest with blood, of the ascension of our Lord into heaven after his passion, to

make intercession for us, and to open the way to the holiest, first to our prayers, in which we draw near to God, and then to our persons, that we may dwell in his presence for ever. Now, therefore, we are exhorted to “ draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

A.—All these glorious truths being revealed to us, we can accurately interpret these types ; but how far may we conclude that they were known, as to their import, to the Jews themselves ?

B.—Certainly their information on these subjects was not equal to ours ; but their knowledge depended upon their spirituality. “ The eyes ” of the pious and prayerful were “ opened to see wondrous things out of the law ” of God, just as the spiritual meaning of the New Testament is now unfolded to the devout and pious. A veiled truth is not wholly hidden ; a shadow indicates the outline of the substance ; and, as all these sacrifices were prescribed from the earliest ages as acts of “ faith,”—a faith, the object of which was Messiah,—the truly pious were always looking forward to a suffering and atoning, as well as to a ruling and victorious, Christ, and to the redemption to be effected by Him. David could introduce Him saying, “ Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not ; a *body* hast thou prepared for me ;” a *nature* in which alone he could suffer, and become a sacrifice. And Isaiah speaks of Him as “ wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.” “ They saw the promises.

afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them."

A.—I now see the admirable wisdom and fitness of the ceremonial law, which I may perhaps call the Gospel of that dispensation.

B.—For this you have the authority of St. Paul, who says, "For unto us was the Gospel preached as well as unto them."

A.—Have we any instance of uninspired Jewish writers who regarded their ceremonial law as mystical and typical?

B.—None of these writers are very ancient; and subsequently to Christianity, their prejudices lay against all such interpretations as would favour Christian doctrine; yet Philo, who lived about the time of Christ, regards the tabernacle as typical of heaven, and the priestly administration of Messiah there. A gloss upon the Babylonian Talmud says expressly, "The figures of the tabernacle relate to spiritual figures, that we may learn from thence more sublime truths." And Rabbi Bechai observes, "The statutes of Moses are a figure of spiritual things, and those spiritual things are above." Many other observations of a similar kind might be produced; but these will show you, that, among the Jewish writers, and according to their traditions, the law had a mystical signification, and this being admitted, the faithful in the earlier times would study it with reference to a further design, and by the teaching Spirit of God would be led into all the truth which was essential to their faith and piety. David, for instance,

knew that Melchisedeck was a type of Messiah ; for he prophesies of Messiah's priesthood, as " of the order " of that mystic personage.

A.—But you mentioned a Third design of the Mosaic Institute.

B.—This was to provide laws for them as a nation, or in their political capacity. These statutes you will find in the writings of Moses. I need only point out to you some particulars in which the laws of Moses exhibit a great superiority to the enactments of other legislators of antiquity. I must however suggest, that there is one grand peculiarity in the Israelitish constitution to be found in no other : It was a solemn compact or covenant between God as their political Head, and them as his people or subjects. They had no need of any legislative assemblies, for their laws were all fixed, and could not be added to or repealed ; their magistrates had the sole office of executing these written statutes ; and the duty of the people was to submit to them. So entirely was Jehovah himself a party in this civil contract, that his immediate interposition, to bless or to punish them as a nation, by miraculous interposition, through all the ages of their polity, was solemnly engaged. To obedience were attached victory, fruitful seasons, and every kind of prosperity : " The Lord shall command a blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all thou settest thine hand unto." On the other hand, defeat, captivity, blasting, mildew, pestilence, with every other conceivable national calamity, were made the penalties of dis-

obedience: “The Lord shall make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed; moreover, he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt.” Deut. xxviii.

A.—For this, then, as well as for other reasons, the Jews might be called indeed a “peculiar people,” as standing in so immediate a relation to God, and being governed by constant miracle.

B.—And you perceive how forcibly this circumstance proves the *Divine authority* under which Moses acted; for, would any man of common prudence, unless conscious of his speaking all these things under the inspiration and by the command of God, have ventured to tell the Israelites that the most terrible calamities, bearing the unequivocal stamp of a supernatural visitation, should follow the violation of his institutions; and that unfailing victories, and abundant harvests, and exemption from all the calamities which might afflict other nations, should uniformly, and in all cases, attend their observance, when the absence of such miraculous interpositions, in any one instance, and certainly no mortal could command them, must have destroyed his credit, and the influence of his laws for ever?

A.—Certainly not; and has not the history of the Jews confirmed the fact of the Divine authority with which Moses was invested when uttering these promises and threatenings?

B.—In the most striking manner. That part of their history which is contained in the Old Testament, and which extends through many ages, most strikingly shows that a connexion, as by an unseen but almighty

hand, was constantly maintained between their national obedience and their prosperity ; and between their idolatries and other transgressions of their law, and their defeats, famines, captivities, degradations, and miseries, of every kind. As often as they repented and turned again to the Lord, they obtained mercy ; but their departures from him, and their apostasies from the faith of their fathers, were as uniformly followed by acts of vengeance on the part of their offended God so eminent, as to hold them up as an admonitory example to all the nations of the earth. Their history since their last dispersion and the utter destruction of the kingdom of Judah, presents, to this day, a remarkable and most exact fulfilment of the denunciations of their great Lawgiver, and affords standing evidence to the present moment of his authority and plenary inspiration.

A.—To which of his denunciations do you refer ?

B.—Turn to Deuteronomy xxviii. 25, and read.

A.—“The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies ; and thou shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”

B.—Now, remember that this prophecy was uttered more than three thousand years ago, and yet to this day the Jews are found in the four quarters of the earth, and scarcely any considerable town in the whole civilized world is without them ; so that the two facts are before us, that they are “removed” out of their own land, and are scattered “into all the kingdoms of the earth.” In vain would you look for the contemporary

nations of former times. They also were at different times largely scattered into different countries by wars, captivities, and deportations, but they have been long lost in the mass; the Jews alone remain, distinct and visible as ever, the monuments of the truth of the prophetic spirit, and of the Divine commission of their great lawgiver. But read also the forty-ninth and fiftieth verses.

A.—“The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, so swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young.”

B.—You have here a manifest prediction of the invasion and conquest of the Romans. They were the most *distant* of any people that ever invaded Palestine; and they are therefore said in the prophecy to “come from far.” Their language was more “unknown” and foreign to the Jews than that of their Assyrian, Chaldean, or Egyptian invaders; and when they are compared to the swiftness of “an eagle,” not only might the rapidity of their conquests, and the rapacity which distinguished them be meant, but an allusion be also made to the eagle standards of the Roman armies. “The nation of fierce countenance” is a graphic description of those frowning and stern legions which carried unrelenting desolation into so many parts of the world; and the cruelty which usually marked their conquest nowhere fell so heavy, or was directed by so

much malignity of feeling, as in their invasions of Judea. Josephus, the Jewish historian, speaking of the capture of Gadara by Vespasian, says, “The Romans showed mercy to no age, *out of hatred to the nation.*”

A.—In the verses which follow, I see that the most horrible calamities were to happen during the sieges which the Jews should undergo in their fortified cities; such as famines so severe, that wives and husbands, parents and children, shquld envy each other a morsel of food, and contend fiercely with each other for it; and that fathers, yea, and mothers too, should eat their own children!

B.—Will you then turn at your leisure to the account given by Josephus of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, and you will find the following passages: “Wives forced the food out of the mouths of their husbands, and children out of the mouths of their parents; and, what was the most miserable of all, mothers out of the mouths of their own infants.” Again: “Wherever in any house but the shadow of bread appeared, instantly a battle ensued, and they who before had been on the most friendly footing, fought against each other with the greatest fury, that they might carry off some miserable scraps for their sustenance.” As for that still more affecting part of the prediction, that mothers should be impelled by the famine to kill and eat their own infants; this happened at the siege of Samaria, mentioned 2 Kings vi. 28, 29, and at the siege of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon; and thus mournfully does Jeremiah record the shudder-

ing fact in Lamentations iv. 10 : “The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children ; they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.” And when Josephus records the particulars of a Jewish mother in the siege by the Romans,—“a woman distinguished by wealth and birth dressing her infant son, and eating him *secretly*,” we see the prophecy in the fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh verses so circumstantially fulfilled, that it might pass for the history itself : “The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward her children which she shall bear ; for she shall eat them for want of all things *secretly* in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in thy gates.”

A.—Truly, all these instances of the exact fulfilment of the words of Moses prove, that he was but the medium of communicating the words of Him who seeth “the end from the beginning.” But you were speaking of the political institutions of Moses, and proposed to point out some of their peculiarities.

B.—Tenderness of human life was one of their characteristics. Not only was the crime of murder made punishable by death, as in many other states ; but he who had killed a man accidentally was obliged to fly to a city of refuge, or was left exposed to the old custom, which required the next of kin to avenge the blood of his relative by slaying the killer. Thus was this ancient practice restrained from barbarity by the

provisiou of an asylum until the case could be inquired into by the judges ; and caution was enforced upon all, lest, by carelessly killing a fellow-creature, they should be subject to the inconvenience of flying to one of the cities of refuge and remaining there often for a considerable time. Even an ox which gored a man to death was destroyed, to render the owners of cattle careful ; and if the owner had been told of the dangerous propensities of his beast, and neglected to restrain it, he was subject to the same penalty.

A.—Was not slavery permitted by Moses to the Jews, as in most other ancient nations ?

B.—The Hebrews themselves were all free ; only a debtor might be made a bondman for a period not exceeding seven years, in payment of his debt ; or this punishment might be inflicted upon a thief, unless he made restitution. The bondage might indeed be continued longer, but only by consent of the bondman himself ; and then he was obliged to be made free at the jubilee. Perpetual involuntary servitude was unknown among the Jews as to their brethren. Foreigners taken in war, purchased, or born in the family, might be held in perpetual servitude ; but provision was made for their humane treatment : They had the full enjoyment of the Sabbath ; they partook of the enjoyments of the three great annual festivals ; and had a right to gather what grew spontaneously on the seventh or sabbatical year, when the ground was left untilled. Their state formed an entire contrast to the condition of slaves in all other countries, and to those of the

West Indies in our day ; to which is to be added, that they were chiefly of those nations of Canaan or its neighbourhood whom God had placed under *judicial malediction*, and so established no example to us. The oppression of this class of men was forbidden under a sanction which no other nation ever thought of or could enact : “ Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant whether he be of thy brethren or of the strangers that are within thy gates, lest he cry against thee to the Lord, and it be sin unto thee ; ” which implies, that God would punish it by immediate visitation of his displeasure, according to the standing mode in which the Jews were governed by God, and his laws enforced. The killing of a slave was also murder by the Mosaic law, but in no ancient law beside ; nor, to our shame be it spoken, for a long time in our own slave colonies.

A.—I think I have read in some ancient authors, that the Jews were inhospitable to strangers.

B.—So they were represented by some, because they were enjoined to avoid that intercourse which would lead to a participation in their idolatrous customs. But strangers were at all times naturalized among the Jews, and shared equally the protection of the law : “ Thou shalt neither vex nor oppress a stranger, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” But there were other provisions which mark the merciful and benevolent character of the Jewish law. To maintain a brotherly feeling among them, they were forbidden to take usury one of another ; and to relieve him “ when fallen into decay, and waxed poor,” which among no other

people was ever made a point of legal injunction. The gleanings of the field were *by law* reserved to the poor ; and if a poor man pledged his garment, it was to be restored to him before night-fall, that he might not be exposed to the cold, destitute of covering. Even beasts of unequal strength, as the ox and the ass, were not to be yoked together ; a kid was not to be seethed in its mother's milk ; and it was forbidden to take the young of birds and the dam together.

A.—May not the Jews be considered as having a perfect political freedom ?

B.—Certainly their constitution was in the best sense a free one. How could it be otherwise when they had God for their Sovereign, whose “service is perfect freedom ?” They were twelve independent tribes, each family being under its natural head, and each tribe under its political head, or judge, who was bound by the laws delivered by God, and which regulated all things on principles of justice and mercy. When they forsook God, they lost their civil freedom, with all the other blessings which they enjoyed.

A.—Was education general among them ?

B.—That all could read is clear from its being made the duty of all parents to teach their children the law ; which supposes that copies of it were in their hands, and that they could use them for this purpose. National education was therefore enjoined as one of the institutions of Moses.

A.—Was encouragement given to literary pursuits ?

B.—The Levites had no portion of the land assigned

to the tribes when they took possession of Canaan, but in lieu of this they had a tenth of the whole produce, and were diffused among the people; so that they had leisure to apply themselves to the literature of the day: From them the priesthood was furnished; and they were scribes, registrars, superintendents of weights and measures, geometricians, and physicians.

A.—I suppose, then, we must conclude that had the Jews been faithful to their God, they would have exhibited a picture of national prosperity and happiness beyond all comparison with the nations of antiquity.

B.—Yes; and at many periods of their history they were truly prosperous and happy. Even in the times of the Judges, (four hundred and sixty years,) “not one fourth was passed under foreign oppression; and many of the servitudes seem to have been local, extending over certain tribes, not over the whole nation. Above three hundred years of peaceful and uneventful happiness remain, to which history, only faithful in recording the crimes and sufferings of man, bears the favourable testimony of her silence.”\* To these we must add a great part of the reign of David, and of Solomon, with a few other favourable periods produced by the influence and example of good kings, and which arrested for a time the downward course of “a stiff-necked and disobedient people.” Had they been obedient, the benignant and interposing providence of God, a fruitful land, regular harvests, equal laws, and a pure and

\* Milman.

beneficent religion would have made the exulting words of Moses always applicable to them : “ Happy art thou, O Israel ! What people is like unto thee, a people saved of the Lord ! ”

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## CONVERSATION X.

PRESERVATIVES AGAINST IDOLATRY.—EVILS OF IDOLATRY.—EXTERMINATION OF THE CANAANITES.—WANDERINGS IN THE WILDERNESS.—ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN.—MIRACLES.—KINGLY GOVERNMENT.—SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS.—THE PROPHETS.

A.—You mentioned a Fourth leading purpose of the law,—to preserve the people from idolatry.

B.—This also is an important view. Idolatry is of two kinds,—the association of other deities, the fictions of our imagination, with the true God, as objects of fear or trust ; and the making of images or representations of Him, or of his attributes, which also has uniformly led to the basest superstition. Both are forbidden in the first and second commandments ; and in every case idolatry was punished with death. If any city fell into this crime, it was to be wholly destroyed, with its inhabitants and their property. So fearfully punished was this crime against the majesty of heaven, and against the purity of society !

A.—But may not idolaters be considered rather as

objects of pity, because of their ignorance and absurdities, than as so deeply criminal ?

B.—Idolatry is always in Scripture treated as a *voluntary* offence ; and in all the ancient nations connected with the Jews, and in those ancient times, it was manifestly so. Their traditions spoke of God ; the great interventions of the true Jehovah during the early Jewish history, were manifestations of his supreme glory before the surrounding nations ; and all nature stood before them in demonstration of his “ eternal power and Godhead.” St. Paul directly charges them with refusing “ to glorify ” Jehovah “ as God,” even when “ they knew ” him ; and therefore declares that they were “ without excuse.”

A.—This I did not advert to.

B.—Nor, perhaps, have you fully considered how many evils, both as they affect an individual in relation to God, and the civil society of which he is a member, are involved in idolatry. It destroys all trust in God ; it prevents his being worshipped as supreme ; it gives the reins to the imagination, and fills it with monstrous and polluted conceptions ; it debases the intellect, and makes men the slaves of superstitious terror : In a word, it destroys all true religion, which essentially rests upon the unity and supremacy of God. Where these are not the objects of a steady faith, there can be no *moral law*, for the will of different deities may be different ; no *providence*, for one deity may be angry with us though another may be supposed propitious ; there can be no *holiness*, for the idols of paganism have ever been

invested with an immoral character ; and there can be no hope of forgiveness, since the only method of human salvation established by God from the beginning, rested upon the doctrine, that there is “one God, and one Mediator.” An idol you know “is nothing,” a mere figment of the fancy ; and therefore to trust in that, is to trust in *nothing*. Thus idolatry destroys all religion.

A.—For that reason I perceive that it was an act of mercy to man to restrain it by severe penalties.

B.—Yes ; and because it destroys all *morality* as well as religion, the Mosaic legislation would have been highly deficient, had it not restrained it by civil penalties. The Canaanites and other idolatrous nations sacrificed their children, by burning them alive to Moloch. The worship of Baal was grossly impure ; and, indeed, cruelty and impurity have ever been the leading characters of idolatry to the present day. It was therefore a crime against society as well as against God ; and the severity of his law spread a shield of protection over the helpless infant, prevented a savage and cruel disposition from being inculcated by the influence of superstition, and preserved the purity of the public morals.

A.—I acknowledge my folly in considering idolatry rather as an object of pity than of disgust and horror. But why were the Jews prohibited from worshipping even the true God in groves, and on the tops of hills ?

B.—Because these were the places in which the Canaanites performed their idol worship, and because the practice favoured the notion of local deities. Great

care also was taken to forbid every idolatrous and superstitious practice ; hence witchcraft and necromancy were made capital crimes ; and, among lesser things, the shaving of the head in a particular manner, the wearing of garments in which linen and woollen were interwoven, the sowing of a field with different kinds of grain, and other practices to which superstition had attached a magical charm and virtue. The great object of the whole was, to turn the Jews from all creatures, and from all dependance on chance, or the operation of occult powers of nature, as well as from idols, *to the ennobling habit of trusting only in the living God.*

A.—May the impious and abominable rites introduced by idolatry so universally among the inhabitants of Canaan, account for the command given to the Israelites, to exterminate them entirely ?

B.—Even so. They had been borne with much longsuffering ; they had been warned ; and, since they had forfeited their lives to their offended God, he was “just in the judgments” which he inflicted upon them.

A.—Have not some infidel writers objected to this proceeding, as involving their children ?

B.—Yes ; but they forgot that in the course of providence, when famines, plagues, and earthquakes visit a nation for sin, children are sufferers in the common calamity. In this case the parents are punished in their children ; and for children dying before actual sin, a full provision is made, as to their eternal happiness, by the mercy of God in Christ.

A.—Do they not also object to the Jews being made

the instruments of this vengeance, as tending to produce in them a cruel disposition?

B.—It becomes not men to sit in judgment upon the ways of God; but these objectors do not see that the great reason of this was, that the Jews themselves, wielding the sword of Divine justice against a guilty race, might receive a more awful conviction of “the severity with which the moral Governor of the world treats wickedness, and punishes idolatry.” As for the tendency to produce a cruel disposition, this is refuted by the fact, that the ancient Jews were of a much milder character than any of the nations of antiquity; and as they must have regarded themselves in this case as the instruments of the Divine justice, a sufficient check was by this solemn consideration put upon all malignant passions.

A.—You will now permit me to ask a few miscellaneous questions which have occurred to me whilst reading the earlier historical books of the Old Testament. Is it lawful to inquire what might be the reasons for keeping the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness?

B.—The principal reason is revealed. It was to punish “a disobedient and gainsaying people,” and to make them “ensamples to us;” lest we should by murmuring, unbelief, and love of the world, lose that heavenly rest, of which Canaan was the type. St. Paul, therefore, admonishes us in these words: “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of

it." But as the designs of God are often wondrously involved in each other, and a leading purpose is connected with many secondary and yet important ones, we may suppose that time was thus given for the religious training up of a new generation, who had not been debased in spirit by the long slavery of Egypt, or infected with its idolatries. An opportunity was also afforded for the continuance of that miraculous guidance of the host of Israel by the visible Deity, which rendered *the type* of "the Church in the wilderness" more perfect and instructive; and by which a testimony was borne against idolatry on the borders of those countries along which the Israelites pursued their marches. There was also a greater display of "the riches of the longsuffering of God" towards the Canaanites, in this delay of their punishment.

A.—Was the Jordan, which was so miraculously divided, a large river?

B.—Travellers describe it, in its ordinary channel, to be deep and rapid, about as broad as the Thames at Windsor. At one period of the year, however, from the melting of the mountain snows, it overflows its banks, and more than doubles its breadth; and it was at this period that the passage took place, so that the miracle was rendered the more illustrious. An assurance was thus given, that God would go before his people into Canaan, and that no obstacle should be able to impede their progress; for as soon as the feet of the Priests bearing the ark touched the stream, the flow of the river was arrested, and the channel became dry; or,

as it is graphically described by the sacred historian, “Then the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon a heap, very far from the city Adam, and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, failed and were cut off.” The place where the Israelites crossed the river was called in our Saviour’s time BETHABARA, or “the place of passage.”

A.—In what did the sin of Achan consist?

B.—In taking of the spoil which was either appointed to be destroyed, or appropriated to God’s treasury, and therefore was called “an accursed” or devoted “thing.” His detection also showed, that no secret crime could be hidden from the Lord.

A.—As this detection of Achan by the lot showed the *omniscience* of Jehovah, so the miracle of the sun and moon standing still, manifested his *power* over universal nature.

B.—True; and there might be a further reason for this signal event: To the Israelites it was a striking illustration of the power of God over the most distant objects in nature, as well as those nearest to them. As Joshua is said to have “gone up from Gilgal all night,” it is probable that the miracle took place early in the morning. The sun had risen above Gibeon which was to the east, and the moon was setting over Ajalon to the west, so that each luminary was in sight, when the whole celestial machinery was stopped by the hand of its great Artificer, with less trouble, and less danger of injury, than any one of us can stop a watch. But to the Canaanites who worshipped the “host of heaven,”

and to whom the sun and moon were the greatest of their deities, the miracle would be peculiarly appalling. They beheld these great visible celestial gods, in whom they trusted, arrested in their course, at the command of the general of the God of Israel, and prolonging their light only to favour their enemies in the pursuit of their own routed forces. Well might it be said, “There was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man,” so as to arrest the whole course of nature; “for the Lord fought for Israel.”

A.—Where was the ark of the Lord, with its tabernacle, stationed after the Israelites took possession of the land of Canaan?

B.—In SHILOH, as recorded Joshua xviii. 1, where it appears to have been placed with great solemnity; for “the whole congregation of Israel” were assembled on the occasion. Shiloh was situated in the south part of the tribe of Ephraim, and lay about two hours’ journey from Jerusalem. To this place, therefore, the people went up, and there the great national acts of worship were performed. The ark continued at Shiloh all the days of Joshua, and through the whole period of the Judges of Israel to the time of Samuel the Prophet, and till just before the death of Eli,—a period of about three hundred and fifty years. In the days of Eli it was taken by the Philistines, after a great defeat of the Israelites, and by them was sent back on account of the plagues inflicted upon them by God: It then remained in the city of Kirjath-Jearim forty-six years. From this place, which is the same as the Baale of Judah, mentioned 2 Sam. vi. 2,

David brought it with great pomp to Jerusalem ; a city which he had adorned with public buildings, and made very magnificent, and where he had prepared a tabernacle for its reception on Mount Sion. It was afterwards deposited in the temple of Solomon, where it remained to the Babylonian captivity, and was lost with other sacred vessels with which that edifice was enriched.

A.—Why was the request of the Israelites to have a king, reckoned to them as an offence ?

B.—Not that monarchy is an objectionable form of government in itself ; for, indeed, the Lord was their King : But, First, because it implied ingratitude to Samuel, who had governed them with singular uprightness and ability ; and, Secondly and chiefly, because it implied a distrust in the special intervention of God in raising up judges for them, and defending them whilst the tribes existed as distinct and small republics, with no bond of connexion but their religion, their national festivals, and their covenant with God. They wished to be organized into one political body, with a king “to go out before them” in their wars, like other nations. They were faithfully warned by Samuel against the consequences which would ensue from this imitation of the oriental despots ; but, as they persisted, Samuel was commissioned to anoint Saul as their Sovereign : And it is remarkable that after two illustrious and successful reigns, those of David and Solomon, that very evil which they hoped to remedy by altering the government first established by Almighty God, namely, the divided state of a community separ-

ated into tribes, was brought upon them, by the rending of the confederacy, and the establishment of two rival kingdoms, Israel and Judah. So sin meets its punishment often in its own way. Yet, notwithstanding that partial rejection of God, which was implied in setting up a kingly government without his authority, God did not forsake them, but renewed his promises of favour both to their king and them, upon condition of their obedience. This also is to be said for the Israelites in the affair,—that they considered their king as the *deputy* or *viceroy* of God himself; and, therefore, they did not elect him themselves, but asked of God to appoint a king to be over them.

A.—Who were “the Prophets,” and the “sons of the Prophets,” mentioned in Samuel, and the other subsequent historical books?

B.—The *sons of the Prophets* are generally understood to be young men who were educated in the schools of the Prophets, under an inspired Prophet, in the knowledge of religion and sacred music; and who were thus qualified to teach religion and morality, and to celebrate the praises of God in sacred verse and chants, accompanied by instrumental music. They were not confined to any particular tribe, but seem to have been persons who voluntarily devoted themselves wholly to the study and exercises of religion. It is probable that God often chose the Prophets, whom he specially inspired, out of these schools, though certainly not exclusively. The sons of the Prophets also appear to have been occasionally visited with a temporary

inspiration ; an instance of which you have in the history of Saul : “ A company of ” these “ Prophets met him, and the Spirit of God,” the same Spirit by which they were influenced, “ came upon him, and he prophesied among them.” This kind of prophesying was probably the celebration of the praises of God, under inspired impulse, in sacred songs, accompanied with musical instruments.

A.—But *the Prophets*, so called by way of eminence, were, I presume, of a higher order than these ; although it appears to me a very interesting circumstance, that a regular body of men should have existed in the Jewish Church as a kind of religious teachers, and employed in the work of offering up public praises to God.

B.—No doubt, in the best ages of the Jewish commonwealth, these schools of the Prophets, existing in various parts of the country, would exercise a very beneficial influence upon the people ; and many a sweet sequestered spot, as well as the crowded town, was made to resound with the high praises of the God of Israel, whilst their occasional inspirations would give them great authority among the people. But in the national defections from truth and piety which followed, these schools were corrupted ; and the “ false prophets,” who so often deceived the people, and pretended a Divine commission, and against whom so many judgments you find frequently threatened, proceeded from them. “ **THE PROPHETS**,” properly so called, fell not into these corruptions ; but stand before us in all the inflexibility of fidelity to their God, and in the high and fear-

less attitude of public reformers ; awed neither by the threats of princes nor by popular clamour ; shunning no reproach, and fearing no form of martyrdom ; but intent only upon delivering their message from God to an apostatizing people, in order to arrest the progress of national vice and error, to restore the pure worship of God, and the authority of his laws, and to rescue their country from those evils which, in their sublime and terrific visions, they saw hanging over it in every form of calamity. Raised up in succession by the call and inspiration of God, they were the heroic champions of piety towards God, and justice towards men. Hence their severe rebukes of every species of oppression ; their espousal of the cause of the poor, the fatherless, and the widow ; and their remonstrances with the nobles of the land, and even with kings, on every violation of duty. With all this we see in them an entire freedom from the spirit of faction. Kings and princes are treated with boldness and fidelity, but always with the respect due to their station ; and when the wrongs of the people are espoused by them, they practise none of the arts of the demagogues of other nations by which they flattered popular passions, in order to obtain celebrity. They were kept from all these failings by the impressive solemnity of their commission, and the power of their inspiration ; and, fixing their regards only upon their high duties, they despised all inferior considerations. They usually resided in retired places, often in obscurity, and generally in comparative poverty ; and though by good

kings they were honoured, and their counsels were sought, they were but occasional residents at their courts. Their apparel was mean, and often symbolical of the mournful moral state of the people among whom they prophesied. Elijah was clothed with skins ; Isaiah wore sackcloth, which seems to have been the ordinary dress of the Prophets. From the piety of individuals, they sometimes received presents of bread, fruits, and honey ; but Elisha refused the costly presents of Naaman the Syrian, and inflicted the punishment of leprosy upon his covetous servant Gehazi, who clandestinely obtained part of them. You will observe several incidental circumstances, as you read the historical Books of Kings and Chronicles, which indicate their general habits, their frugality, and their contempt of luxury. The woman of Shunam, who appears to have been in good circumstances, put only a few plain and common utensils into the chamber which she prepared for the Prophet on his visits. The angel gave to Elijah only bread and water for a long journey. The same sustenance was administered by Obadiah, the Governor of the king's household, to the Prophets whose lives he saved from a cruel persecution and massacre. Elisha was called from the plough, and lived in poverty ; Amos was a herdsman, and, externally, did not improve his condition ; and the sons of the Prophets who lived under the direction of Elijah and Elisha, erected their own dwellings, and cut down the timber with their own hands. Thus they despised secular riches and favours, and discharged their high office

unawed by persecutions and death, which many of them suffered in the most frightful forms.

A.—I have been in the habit of regarding the Prophets separately, rather than as a succession of men raised up from age to age to fulfil so important a ministry. I thank you for calling my attention to *the order* of Prophets, if I may so speak; and I now contemplate them with greater reverence. The disobedience of the Jews to such messengers sent to them in so long a succession, and accredited as they often were with miraculous powers, surely rendered them quite inexcusable.

B.—And you will find that the pious Jews were so impressed with this, that they attributed the overthrow of their city and state to that habitual and obstinate disregard, which, with the exception of a few short periods, they showed towards the Prophets of the Lord: Always afraid of the true Prophets, hating them for their fidelity, and infatuated with their passion for heathen superstition and idolatry, they sought for and rewarded those who would “prophesy to them smooth things;” and, as they sought delusion, they were suffered to fall into it. The passage in which their disobedience to the messengers of God is expressed, you will find 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 15—17.

A.—I will turn to it: “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising betimes and sending;”—

B.—That is, continually and carefully sending, as persons rise early to a work of great importance and on which they have set their heart. But read on.

A.—“Because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place ; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his Prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy : Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age : He gave them all into his hand.”

B.—And does this teach us no lesson ?

A.—It teaches us, by the force of examples so awfully monitory, the great guilt and danger of “rejecting the word of the Lord.”

B.—You recollect, too, that if the first national destruction of the Jews by the King of Babylon was brought upon them for their disobedience to his Prophets, their rejection of Christ, and the words of his inspired Apostles, led to the “sorer punishment” of their miserable overthrow by the Romans. The same “Prophets,” the same great “Teacher sent from God,” the same Apostles and Evangelists, daily speak unto us, and call us to repentance, faith, and persevering holiness ; let us then attend to those standing and impressive warnings which the history of the Jews exhibits, and pray that we may be enabled to “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”

## CONVERSATION XI.

SAUL.—WITCH OF ENDOR.—DAVID.—SOLOMON.—DESTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOMS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.—SAMARITANS.—RESTORATION OF JUDAH.—MORAL STATE OF JUDEA AFTER THE RETURN FROM THE CAPTIVITY.—SECOND TEMPLE.—ALEXANDER THE GREAT.—JEWISH COLONIES.—SEPTUAGINT.—HELLENISTIC JEWS.—JEWISH LITERATURE.

A.—As to the writings of the Prophets, I shall take another opportunity of making some inquiries; at present, suffer me to ask a few questions which respect circumstances in the history of the Jews in the period subsequent to that of the Judges. Was the evil spirit with which Saul was troubled, a diabolical possession?

B.—So it would appear, because Saul is held accountable to God for his actions; which he would not have been, had he been merely insane, as some suppose. The music of David might be of service even in this case, as calming the animal spirits, and soothing his feelings after those assaults which the evil spirit was permitted to make upon him, and which appear to have expressed themselves in violent paroxysms of anger and jealousy. This was part of his punishment: His obstinate and rebellious disposition had provoked the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord departed from him before “the evil spirit from God” (that is; permitted by God) “troubled him.” Remem-

ber that the Spirit of God and the evil spirit cannot dwell in the same breast.

A.—Truly, the subsequent life of Saul presents a most affecting picture of a man forsaken of God.

B.—There was one remedy still, and that was humiliation and prayer ; but his spirit was as unbending and obdurate as it was dark and wretched. It is true, he “inquired of the Lord,” when a great host of Philistines came against him ; but this was not properly an act of prayer, accompanied with confession of his own sin, and that of the people, but merely inquiring for counsel and direction in a great public danger ; and the historian adds, in words which make one shudder, so awfully do they depict the unhappy case of the forsaken monarch :—“ And the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams nor by Urim,” (the breastplate of the High Priest,) “ nor by Prophets ;” he had no directing and assuring impressions in sleep ; the oracle of the ark of God was dumb to the inquiries he made by the High Priest ; and of all the Prophets which were in Israel at the time, not one was commissioned by God to bear to him any message of counsel or comfort. In the deep melancholy and desperation which ensued, (and remember how often, and how patiently, and yet fruitlessly, he had been counselled by the venerable Samuel, now no more,) he was seized with a determination to try unlawful arts in order to converse with the disembodied spirit of this faithful adviser, and accordingly applied to a woman who professed the art of raising up and obtaining responses from the spirits of the dead.

A.—But had this wicked woman power to call one of God's departed servants from his rest?

B.—Certainly not. If she was not a mere impostor who obtained credit among the vulgar by artifice, and if her commerce with evil spirits enabled her to do some preternatural things which she might turn to gainful purposes among those who secretly consulted her, she had no such power as this. The real Samuel appeared, when probably she intended only some deception; and her “crying with a loud voice” when she saw him, proves that she was alarmed by something unexpected by herself whilst practising her incantations. The whole was a special interposition of God, punishing in Saul the practice of necromancy, which was strictly forbidden in the law; and warning him of his end, or, rather, pronouncing the final sentence upon him, by the appearance of the spirit of Samuel, whose predictions were fully verified by the mournful result.

A.—The dialogue between Saul and Samuel is very moving and pathetic.

B.—It is deeply so; and the message uttered by Samuel is so much in character, and so manifestly breathes the spirit of a Divine commission, that, containing as it also does, an explicit prediction, which was exactly accomplished, we must conclude (let loose and sceptical commentators conjecture what they please) that there was no deception here. The account not only shows that the Jews believed in the doctrine of apparitions; but that in fact such an appearance, on this occasion, did actually occur, which answers all the

objections which were ever raised or can be raised, from the philosophy of the case, against the *possibility* of the appearance of departed spirits.

A.—You believe then in apparitions?

B.—I believe in this apparition of the departed Samuel, because the text positively calls the appearance “Samuel:” “And SAMUEL said, Why hast thou disquieted *me*, to bring *me* up?” Add to this, the account is given in the form of simple narrative, and cannot therefore be resolved into poetic fiction; and, further, a prediction was uttered which was fulfilled. As for apparitions generally, most of the accounts current among men may be resolved into illusion and superstition; Still there are some which rest upon an evidence both of circumstances, and of credit and sobriety in the narrators, which renders it very difficult not to admit them. On this subject, I would caution you equally against credulity and unbelief.

A.—David, I presume, is to be accounted the greatest of the Hebrew monarchs?

B.—Doubtless; and his character and conduct, with one or two sad exceptions, which he himself bemoaned with the deepest penitential sorrow, are such as the mind dwells upon with the highest admiration. The piety of his youth; the nobleness of his spirit; the loftiness and variety of his genius; his valour, conspicuous in an age of great warriors; his kindness of heart, and domestic tenderness; his justice as a ruler; his appropriate magnificence as a king; and, above all, his inflexible adherence to the pure worship of God;

are all characters which, from the variety of circumstances in which he moves before us, are placed under the strongest and most interesting developements.

A.—May he not be considered as the founder of Jerusalem?

B.—Considered as the capital city of his kingdom. It was an ancient town and fortress; and so strong by nature, being almost surrounded with precipitous rocks and deep ravines, that the Jebusites still held possession of it to his day, and had defied all attempts to dispossess them. David achieved the conquest, and then removed his royal residence from Hebron. The situation of Jerusalem was commanding and beautiful, and so conveniently situated for the assembling of the tribes at their great festivals, as to give it the preference to all others as the metropolis. David, enlarged it with magnificent buildings; removed the ark of God in solemn procession, and with the most impressive solemnities; and made large and ample preparations for the erection of that celebrated temple which was built by Solomon. Thus he at once furnished the nation with a suitable capital, and made provision for the perpetuation and due celebration of the national religion.

A.—He seems also to have enlarged the Jewish territory beyond all former conquests.

B.—He extended it to the furthest limit of the promised land; so that the Euphrates, called often by way of eminence “the river,” became its boundary on the east. He obtained military possession of Edom; subdued the Moabites; humbled the Syrians, and held

them and the Philistines in awe. Thus he left a most flourishing and powerful kingdom to his son Solomon ; having himself reigned forty years.

A.—Yet his latter days were clouded and troubled.

B.—This shows the impartiality of God, and his hatred of sin. The moral transgression of the law of God was not more tolerated in David than in Saul. The latter, indeed, departed wholly from the Lord ; whilst David, who also fell by temptation, returning to God in penitence and prayer, found His mercy. But though his sin was forgiven as to its eternal consequences, it had a most severe chastisement in this life. Family afflictions and dissensions, civil strifes, and the unnatural rebellion of Absalom, followed ; and that terrible threat hung over his race, and darkened all his prospects as to the glory of his family, which was pronounced by one of those intrepid Prophets of whom we have spoken : “The sword shall never depart from thine house.”

A.—This is a sufficient answer to the sneers of infidels at his being called “a man after God’s own heart ;” which they profanely interpret into an approval of his entire conduct, instead of his general character.

B.—And like all sneers at sacred things, it shows equal folly and malice. You will ever find the scorner wilfully ignorant ; a circumstance which shows that infidelity results not from want of evidence in the Bible, but from a bad heart. HUME, the most subtle and malignant of our infidel writers, confessed that he had never read the Scriptures with attention. Even if

he had, the state of his mind would probably have prevented him from seeing their excellence;—so greatly does a corrupt heart often enslave the judgment. When men seek error they are sure to find it.

A.—In what consisted the sin of David in numbering the people?

B.—In his doing it without command from God, and in nourishing perhaps a secret vanity and presumption, when reflecting upon the great increase of the people, and the prosperity of the nation under his government. Pride is rebuked in man, that he may not “trust in himself, but in the living God.” In all things we must give the glory to Him.

A.—Even Joab, though a bad man, as appears from his whole conduct, objected to this measure.

B.—True; and this teaches us, that our infirmities and sins, though often hidden from ourselves through self-love, are very obvious to others. The severity of the judgment which fell upon the people, was no doubt designed at once to punish the pride of David, and of the nation too, which was probably more elated by its successes in war and its prosperity, than even its sovereign. Both were taught that life and all things are in the hands of God; and that this ought to be ever humbly acknowledged by men.

A.—Was there any thing contrary to the spirit of piety, in David advising Solomon, in his last hours, to put Joab and Shimei to death?

B.—Certainly not; for he spoke not as a private man, but as *a king and a judge*, whose duty it was to

punish such offences as both had been guilty of, as soon as the case would allow of it. It does not however appear that he commanded Solomon to put them to death absolutely. He recommended it to him to deal with them "according to his wisdom;" that is, as he should judge circumstances to require, for their lives were already forfeited upon principles of justice; and to take the first opportunity which their factious conduct might afford, to inflict upon them a deserved capital punishment. This, each afterwards brought upon himself; one by actual rebellion, the other by taking suspicious steps to excite it. In this matter the mercy, rather than the severity, of David was manifested. Joab and Shimei deserved death, and yet both were put in circumstances to avoid it by a reformed conduct.

A.—The reign of Solomon was eminently peaceful and prosperous.

B.—The greater part of it, though not the whole. He stands as a fine example to youth, to devote themselves early to God, and to ask of Him true wisdom above all things. But his history teaches the young man as forcibly, that, without vigorous perseverance in well-doing, it is not enough to begin life well; and that if once the allurements of sense, and the lusts of the flesh, are yielded to, they will probably cover that character with the deepest shame, which gave the best promise of an honourable course of piety and usefulness. The king who long ruled with so much wisdom and justice, became in his old age an oppressor of his

people by his exactions ; the man who built the magnificent temple, and offered a prayer as sublime for its theological sentiment, as devout for its feeling, became a base idolater ! “ He built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, *in the hill that is before Jerusalem*,” as though in studied affront of the majesty of God in the very sight of his temple,—“ and for Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon.”

A.—Is not the Book of Ecclesiastes generally thought to have been written in the last years of his life, and to be an evidence of his repentance ?

B.—It was more probably written in the middle of life, before he had fully fallen from God ; for it is a testimony of the “ vanity ” of all external grandeur and pleasure, independent of the blessing and favour of God. There is nothing specially penitential in this Book to support the opinion you have mentioned ; and the probability is, that Solomon’s idolatrous infatuation increased with his years. Remember, therefore, that not even *religious* wisdom, much less *human* wisdom, can keep man from evil, without watchfulness, self-denial, and prayer.

A.—As David enlarged the territory, so Solomon appears to have increased the commerce, of his country.

B.—Being master of the eastern branch of the Red Sea, his fleets, manned by the Tyrians, sailed to Ophir, or the East Indies. The Tyrians and Phenicians opened to him the commerce of the Mediterranean as far as Tarshish, which is supposed to be the south of Spain ; beside which, he had a great inland

trade with Egypt, and another with Assyria and the countries in that direction. The celebrated cities, Palmyra or Tadmor, and Baalath or Balbeck, are supposed to have been built by him. At the close of his life his kingdom however became unsettled, and his subjects dissatisfied, and gave indications of that revolt which took place upon the accession of his unwise son Rehoboam, when the twelve tribes were divided into the rival kingdoms of Israel and Judah ; over the latter of which only the descendants of David reigned.

A.—How long did the kingdom of Israel continue ?

B.—Scarcely for three hundred years, through a succession of kings, for the most part wicked and idolatrous ; and the great mass of people were finally carried away by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and planted in that empire. The country was then inhabited by a people called Cuthæans, although under that name several other colonies from “ Babylon, and Ava, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim ” were included. These were planted by the Assyrian monarch in the cities of the kingdom of Samaria, and were subsequently taught the Jewish religion by a Priest, and in part embraced it ; but they mingled with it their own superstitions and idolatries ; so “ they feared the Lord, and served their own gods.”

2 Kings xvii. 33. This corrupt form of religion ever afterward distinguished the Samaritans, who, at a subsequent period, built a temple to rival that at Jerusalem. They had, however, the sacred Book of the Pentateuch, copies of which, as we have said, are still extant ; and they preserved it in great purity. To the Jews the

Samaritans would always be an odious people ; but the hostility manifested by the latter towards them after their return from Babylon, produced a deadly national and hereditary hatred, which ages did not extinguish. Thus in the time of our Lord, we read, “ The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.”

A.—There have been many conjectures, I believe, respecting the places where the ten tribes, who were carried away captive, may still be found existing as a separate and collective people.

B.—Some of them united themselves to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin upon their return from captivity ; and that they were mingled with the mass of the Jews both in Judea and other parts of the Roman Empire, is plain from the Epistle of St. James, which is inscribed “ to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” This is all we know of them. Striking resemblances have, indeed, been traced among the Afghans of India to the physiognomy and customs of the Jews ; and their language is also said to bear strong marks of Hebrew origin. But the languages and manners of eastern nations are often in many respects very similar, where, as to their origin, they are quite distinct. No certain evidence has as yet been obtained of the existence of the tribes of Israel as a separate people ; and that they so exist appears improbable.

A.—How much longer did the kingdom of Judah continue after the carrying away of the ten tribes of Israel by the Assyrians ?

B.—Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, was

taken by Shalmaneser, seven hundred and nineteen years before Christ ; and Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, five hundred and eighty-seven years before Christ.

A.—Which were the leading powers of the world, in those ancient times ?

B.—Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. The Medes and Persians were rising also to eminence. The glory of the Greek states was but in its dawn ; and the Romans were unknown beyond their own contracted territory in Italy.

A.—The captivity in Babylon appears to have had a salutary effect upon the Jews, for we do not find them afterwards turning away from the worship of God to idols.

B.—The judgments which had fallen upon them so falsified the hopes held out by false prophets, of which you find several instances in the historical Scriptures, and in the Book of Jeremiah ; and so established the influence of the true Prophets of God ; that many of the people, softened by their adversities, appear to have turned to the Lord in truth, during the captivity. The example of Daniel, and the three noble confessors who were miraculously delivered from the terrible death to which they had been sentenced, for refusing to comply with the command of the King of Babylon to worship one of his idols, had no doubt a very beneficial influence. The capture of Babylon also by the Medes and Persians, and that in a manner which so exactly fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah ; their own deliverance from captivity at the end of seventy years, by the instrumentality of

CYRUS, whose name, so long before his birth, had been mentioned by Isaiah; and the public confession of Jehovah as the only true God by Nebuchadnezzar and succeeding monarchs in their public decrees, must also have produced a powerful effect; and, above all, those pious and devoted men whom God raised up among them, as Daniel, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Ezra, &c., with the Prophets Obadiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah, who lived either during the captivity, or a little subsequently to it, contributed by their zeal, piety, and example, to recover them to the worship of the God of their fathers. With a great and influential leaven of good among them, they were, however, far from being a fully reformed people, after their restoration.

A.—How does this appear?

B.—The Babylonian empire having been subverted by Cyrus, that monarch issued an edict for the return of the Jews to their own land, to rebuild their city and temple: The sacred vessels of the temple were also restored. By the influence of the Samaritans the work was, however, impeded; but on the accession of Darius Hystaspes, the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged Zerubbabel to complete it, for which the sanction of the Persian court was obtained. In a subsequent reign, Ezra led forth another body of Jews from Babylon. He found the temple and city built, but without fortifications; and, what was more affliction to him, he ascertained that the people had contracted marriages with the surrounding stranger tribes. A few years afterwards Nehemiah, animated by the loftiest spirit of pious

patriotism, left his high post at the Persian court to forward a work which, after all, had been but carelessly prosecuted by the people. He roused their spirit and courage, and brought them to labour diligently at the fortifications of Jerusalem, with their weapons of war laid beside them to repel the attacks of the Samaritans, Ammonites, and Arabians ; and he completed the whole with wonderful celerity. He relieved the poor from the oppression of their rapacious nobles ; and, in a solemn assembly, engaged all by oath to observe the law of God. The genealogies of the people were also, under his direction, inquired into and arranged ; and by his wise administration the civil condition of the Jews began to assume the appearance of order and prosperity. At the same time Ezra was diligently employing himself in collecting the sacred books, reading them in public, and giving the sense of the law in Chaldee, which cognate dialect had taken the place of the pure Hebrew during the captivity. Synagogues are supposed by some to have been now established ; by others, and with more probability, that they were merely multiplied at this time. They were of great importance, however, for diffusing religious knowledge among the people, inasmuch as they were not only places of public worship, but used for the regular reading of the Scriptures ; for which purpose, copies were rapidly multiplied. The books collected by Ezra, and received as the sacred canon by the whole nation, were the Pentateuch, or five Books of Moses ; the historical and prophetic Books, as we now receive

them; and the Hagiographa, comprising the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Malachi were afterwards added, as is generally supposed by critics, in the time of Simon the Just. Thus every provision was made for the instruction of the people, and their preservation from error and idolatry; and certainly with great effect. But the moral picture which the nation subsequently presented was not very cheering. Much of truth and righteousness appear to have been found in many individuals, and sometimes in the nation; but great and frequent aberrations from both occurred, which were punished by wars and public calamities. Malachi, the last of the Prophets, who lived about four hundred and twenty years before Christ, reproves the people sharply for various vices, and for a great, and, as it appears, general, disrespect to the worship of God, even after their temple had been rebuilt, and their polity restored. A considerable Jewish party, upon the establishment of the Greek kingdoms in their neighbourhood after the death of Alexander the Great, became infected with Grecian manners, and Grecian idolatry. Jason, one of the High Priests, suffered the services of the temple to fall into disuse, and sent a contribution to the games which were celebrated at Tyre in honour of Hercules. Encouraged in part by the apostate Jews, an attempt was made fully to establish the idolatry of the Greeks, and to prohibit that of the true God, by Antiochus Epiphanes, by whose command the Jewish religion was wholly forbidden, and the

people obliged to eat swine's flesh, and to profane the Sabbath; whilst the temple itself was dedicated to Jupiter. During the persecution which ensued, many noble martyrs and confessors of the faith of their ancestors showed themselves, who endured sufferings and death in the most extreme form, rather than pollute themselves with idols; and the hallowed and patriotic valour of the family of the Maccabees finally saved their country, and their religion. Still there were many idolatrous traitors to God's cause, and to their country's independence, among them; although, properly speaking, there was no voluntary *national* relapse into idolatry.

A.—It will be instructive, if you will give me at least a sketch of the Jewish history, from the captivity to the coming of Christ.

B.—You will find an interesting and accurate account of these events in Prideaux's "Connexion of the History of the Old Testament, with that of Neighbouring Nations;" but a mere outline may be easily presented. The first great act of the Jews, after their return, was, as we have seen, the rebuilding of their cities, and especially the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple, both of which had been almost rased to the ground.

A.—Was the second temple of equal magnitude and opulence with the first?

B.—It was built upon the old foundations; and was afterwards greatly enriched by the contributions paid annually to it by the Jews of all countries; but at first it was comparatively poor, although many of the sacred vessels were munificently sent back by the Persian

kings. It was inferior to the first in the following important particulars : It wanted the ARK ; the MERCY SEAT ; the SHECHINAH, or Divine presence, manifested by a visible cloud resting upon the mercy-seat ; the URIM and THUMMIM in the breast-plate of the High Priest, of which we know nothing, only that the words signify *light* and *perfection*, and that, by these, intimations of the Divine will were sometimes given in cases of national difficulty ; and finally, it wanted the HOLY FIRE of the altar, which was first kindled from heaven, and was fed by the Priests, day and night, until the capture of the city by the Babylonians.

A.—But did not the Prophet Haggai predict that the second temple should be more glorious than the first ?

B.—He did ; and since in so many high and sacred particulars it was less glorious, he must have referred to some circumstance not connected with the external splendour of the second house ; and which, I think, will easily suggest itself to you.

A.—Truly, our blessed Lord himself appeared in this second temple, and often taught in it.

B.—And his visible appearance, as the Divine glory and presence incarnate, was an event of which the ancient Shechinah was but a type ; and so the glory of the second house excelled that of the former. But to proceed : The Jews continued to live under the protection of the Persian kings, and in a kind of dependence upon the Persian empire, but still governed by their own laws, until its subversion by Alexander the Great. The chief rule of the country, by degrees, devolved upon

the High Priest ;—an office which therefore became the object of keen ambition, and often of furious contests among themselves, and of intrigues with foreign princes, in order to secure their influence. During this period the Jews appear to have been scarcely known to the Greeks ; and they remained in comparative quiet whilst the elements of those convulsions among the nations of the earth, from which they were ultimately to feel their full of change and suffering, were gathering strength at a distance.

A.—Did the mighty Alexander take Judea into his march of victory ?

B.—After having captured and demolished Tyre and Gaza, he appears to have marched towards Jerusalem in great anger, because the Jews thought themselves still bound by their oath of fidelity to Darius. His anger was disarmed by the High Priest Jaddua going forth to meet him with the Priests in their proper habits, and all the people in white garments. They had previously solemnly besought the Lord in prayer, with sacrifices and oblations, and He was pleased to turn the heart of Alexander, who entered pacifically into Jerusalem, and offered sacrifices to God in his temple. It is said that here the High Priest showed to him the Prophecies of Daniel, which predicted the overthrow of the Persian empire by a king of Greece ; and he became so kindly affected to the Jews, that he granted them the freedom of their own laws, and exemption from tribute every sabbatical or seventh year, in which, according to their law, they neither

sowed nor reaped. Alexander having conquered Egypt founded Alexandria; and, in order to encourage its growth and prosperity, induced colonies from different parts to settle there, and among the rest great numbers of Jews, who fixed their residence both in that rising city, and in other parts of Egypt, and had equal civil privileges with the Macedonians.

A.—At this time, Judea appears to have been an appendage to the Macedonian empire; to which, then, of the successors of Alexander did it fall, for I recollect that his great generals seized upon and divided his empire among themselves?

B.—At first to Laomedon; but Ptolemy, king of Egypt, attempting to possess himself of the whole of Syria, conquered Palestine and captured Jerusalem. He carried away one hundred thousand captives into Egypt, and settled them, some in Alexandria, and others in Cyrene. Ptolemy being anxious to promote the prosperity of Alexandria, gave the Jewish captives great privileges, which led many of their brethren in Judea to emigrate thither voluntarily; so that the number of Jews in Egypt became very great. There they acquired considerable opulence, and many of them were raised to the highest offices, both in the state and in the Græco-Egyptian armies.

A.—I have noticed that the Jews, from this time, seem to have formed no inconsiderable part of the population of many of the ancient and celebrated cities.

B.—Seleucus, another of the successors of Alexander, not content with his large kingdom beyond the

Euphrates, seized upon Syria, and established the Syro-Grecian kingdom, of which he made Antioch the capital. He, like many other princes of that age, was a great builder of cities; and the method then adopted to people them was, to encourage foreign colonies to settle in them. Seleucus is said to have built sixteen Antiochs, in honour of Antiochus his father; nine cities called Seleucia, from himself; six Laodiceas, from Laodice his mother; three Apameas, from Apama his first wife; and one Stratonicea, from Stratonice his last wife. With this prince the Jews were in great favour, probably because those of them who were in the countries on and beyond the Euphrates, the descendants of the ten tribes which had been transplanted into Assyria, and of the two which had been carried captive into Babylon, where they had greatly multiplied, had adhered to his interests in those provinces where he laid the first foundation of his power. To all his new cities he therefore invited the Jews, giving them equal freedom and immunities with the Greeks and Macedonians; and especially in Antioch, in Syria, where they settled in great numbers. Hence it was that the Jews became dispersed all over Syria, and Asia Minor, where we find them with their synagogues and assemblies, practising their own religion, and even making proselytes of the Greeks and other Heathens, in the time of the Apostles. In this respect, their dispersion was greatly serviceable to the propagation of Christianity; for many of these Jews, and the proselytes, as we read in the Acts of the Apos-

ties, believed, and formed the first Christian Churches. The existence of the Jews in this singular state, both as a nation in Palestine, and widely diffused as colonies in the principal cities of the then civilized world, was doubtless designed by Providence to prepare the way for that great event, the rapid and extensive propagation of Christianity.

A.—And as they appear to have retained the true religion, it is pleasing to contemplate the scene which is thus presented to the mind, the worship of the true God being publicly celebrated for several ages, not only in Judea, but in the most populous and idolatrous cities of the pagan world.

B.—That the power of true piety did not influence the Jews to a great extent, may be allowed; but yet, as we know there were some truly “devout persons” in some of these places, we may hope that a considerable number existed, who must remain hidden till the resurrection of the just. What light they were the means of spreading among the Heathen, and how many true proselytes were made from idolatry, who came “to put their trust under the wings of the God of Israel,” to use their own expressive and beautiful language, are subjects also for future manifestation. In the mean time, there is reason to hope that much moral good was the result of this dispersion of the Jews, not as captives, but as respectable colonists; every where publicly professing their religion, publicly reading their sacred books, and generally protected in the exercise of their worship.

A.—Did they retain their own language?

B.—In Egypt and the Greek cities they adopted the Greek language; although the Hebrew was still preserved, but not as their vernacular tongue. They were therefore called Hellenistic Jews, in distinction from those who spake the Hebrew, (a kind of Chaldaico-Syriac,) and who were called “ Hebrews.”

A.—Had they, then, a translation of the Scriptures into Greek?

B.—They had the version usually called the Septuagint, which was made in Egypt, and respecting which there are several traditions; as, that it was made by command of one of the Ptolemies for his celebrated Alexandrian library, and executed by *seventy-two* interpreters. The most probable account, however, is, that it was suggested by necessity; the Jews in Egypt rapidly losing their native language, and adopting the Greek. And as they were so numerous there as to have a Sanhedrim, or great Council, like that in Judea, composed of seventy or seventy-two elders, it was probably executed under their authority, and hence received its name. This version of the Holy Scriptures was spread among all the Hellenistic Jews, and read in their synagogues, both in Egypt, where they were very numerous, and in all other places in which they had adopted the Greek language; and thus provision was made, by this great and important work, for the preservation of the knowledge of the word of God among the Jews of the dispersion.

A.—You say the Jews had synagogues in Egypt; had they not also a temple?

B.—Onias, who was rightful heir to the High-Priesthood in Judea, having been wrongfully deprived of this office, fled to Egypt, and was allowed to dedicate a temple there to the true God. The scruples of the Jews, at the establishment of a rival temple to that of Jerusalem, were overcome by the consideration that Onias was the legitimate High Priest; and by his application of a prediction in Isaiah xix. 18, 19, that “there should be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt.” This circumstance, and the reading of the law in Greek, gave offence to the stricter Jews of Palestine, who never very cordially acknowledged their Egyptian brethren. The latter, however, continued their annual contributions to the temple at Jerusalem.

A.—I have read of Philo, and other learned and philosophic Alexandrian Jews: I suppose, therefore, that they arose from among the Hellenized Jews of Egypt.

B.—You are correct. The Jews of Palestine do not appear to have been entirely ignorant of the Greek philosophy; but Alexandria, under its Greek sovereigns, became a celebrated seat of Grecian learning, and long continued to be so. Many of the educated Jews, therefore, turned their attention to Greek literature; and its philosophy was by them strongly mingled with the Jewish religion. Philo was a Platonized Jewish writer, who lived about the time of Christ.

A.—Now you have glanced at Jewish literature; I will thank you to give me some information respecting the *Targums* and the *Talmud*.

B.—The *Targums* are paraphrases and expositions of the Hebrew text in the Chaldee tongue; which dialect, you recollect, the Jews chiefly spoke after the captivity. So that, when “the law was read in the synagogues every Sabbath-day,” in pure biblical Hebrew, an explanation was subjoined to it in Chaldee. The oldest extant are those of Onkelos and Jonathan, who are supposed to have lived about the time of Christ. The *Talmud*, a word which signifies *doctrine*, is a digest of doctrines and precepts relative to religion and morality. It consists of two parts,—the *Misna*, or text, and the *Gemara*, or commentary. *Misna* signifies repetition, and consists of various traditions of the Jews and expositions of Scripture texts. The *Gemaras* are two,—the *Gemara* of Jerusalem, and that of Babylon; one compiled in the third, the other in the sixth, century. Many of these traditions and comments are vain, fanciful, absurd, and monstrously fabulous. To these Jewish writings we must add the Apocryphal Books, most of which were the productions of Alexandrian Jews; and some of them, although not canonical, contain very valuable, and sometimes highly eloquent, passages.

## CONVERSATION XII.

PERSECUTIONS OF ANTIOCHUS. — MACCABEES. — PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES. — POMPEY. — HEROD.

A.—BUT I diverted you, in our last conversation, from your historical sketch.

B.—Under the reigns of the three first Ptolemies, the Jews flourished in peace ; but it was their lot that their country should become an object of contention between the rival sovereigns of Egypt and Syria ; and it was alternately in possession of each ; the internal government, however, being in the hands of the High Priest. It belonged to Syria on the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes, under whose bigoted and sanguinary reign, as I before said, an attempt was made wholly to exterminate its religion. To luxury, pride, and gross sensuality, this abandoned sovereign added a furious bigotry for his idolatrous faith ; and he determined to establish uniformity of worship throughout his dominions. I have mentioned his violent dedication of the temple of God to Jupiter, and also that many instances of heroic martyrdom were exhibited. Two women, who, in defiance of the tyrant's prohibition, had circumcised their children, were led through Jerusalem with their children hanged round their necks ; and were then cast down from the steepest part of the walls : And with the same severity were all treated who continued to practise their ancient rites, and refused

to conform to idolatry. Eleazar, a scribe, ninety years of age, died nobly confessing his faith, exhorting the young also to die courageously “for the honourable and holy laws.” And Josephus gives a most affecting relation of seven brethren, who, encouraged by their devout and heroic mother, endured the most excruciating torments, rather than sacrifice to idols. The same barbarities were practised throughout the country; the worship of God was every where interdicted; the people massacred, or brutally treated; and, to crown the whole, the impure orgies of Bacchus were substituted for the feast of tabernacles.

A.—What was the result?

B.—The rescue of the country, and its restoration to civil independence, by the hallowed patriotism of the family of the Maccabees;—a family of heroes and confessors, justly held in the grateful remembrance of the Jews of all succeeding ages for their piety, valour, and enterprize, and for the services they rendered their nation. The First Book of Maccabees, inserted in the Apocrypha, is an accurate history of their exploits; written probably in the time of John Hyrcanus, when the wars in which they distinguished themselves were terminated. The Second Book is not so much to be depended upon; but contains some interesting, and, in substance, authentic particulars. To these Books I refer you for the history of this period. John Hyrcanus fully threw off the Syrian yoke, and Judea remained independent until it fell under the dominion of the Romans.

A.—Was not this Hyrcanus a vigorous and successful prince?

B.—Under him the nation greatly flourished; and he subdued the rival state of Samaria, and added it to his kingdom; totally destroying the chief city, and the rival temple on Mount Gerizim. He entered also into a treaty, offensive and defensive, with the Romans.

A.—Do not the sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees begin about this time to appear in the Jewish history?

B.—They present themselves not only as religious distinctions, but as powerful political factions. Their origin is obscure; the Sadducees are traced to Sadoc, who lived about two hundred and sixty years before Christ. They rejected all traditions, and professed to adhere to the plain letter of Scripture; but they denied the resurrection of the body, the existence of angels and spirits; and, as some say, both fate and providence. They show the influence of the heathen philosophy upon many of the educated part of the Jews, in consequence of their intercourse with the Greek kingdoms, with which, from the time of Alexander, their country became politically connected; and they may be considered among the Jews, as the Socinians among ourselves, the assertors of the baneful principle,—that the Scriptures are to be admitted, rejected, and interpreted according to our own rational views of the subjects they contain, instead of employing reason, in its own proper office, to discover their meaning by diligent reading, and comparing one part with another. The sect of the Sadducees was con-

fined chiefly to the higher ranks of society. The Pharisees were by far the most numerous and popular sect.

A.—Why were they so called?

B.—From the Hebrew word *pharash*, which signifies *separated*, or, *set apart*; because they *separated* themselves from the rest of the Jews to superior strictness in religious observances, even to the most minute particulars of ceremonial exactness, partly founded on the law, but more frequently upon traditions, of which they held the Divine authority; and, of which, from age to age, like the Roman Catholics, who also boast of traditions, they increased the number. They held a kind of predestination, yet not so as wholly to take away free-will. They strenuously contended against the Sadducees for the doctrines of the existence of spiritual beings, and the resurrection of the body. They held the merit of works, and therefore attempted to perform those of supererogation; that is, such as the law itself had not required. They were strenuous maintainers, also, of the temporal reign of Messiah, and flattered the pride of the nation, by holding out the hope, that at his coming he would subdue all nations under their feet.

A.—They appear to me to have been imitated very much by the Roman Catholics.

B.—Popery is compounded of corrupted Judaism, corrupted Christianity, and Paganism; one predominating in one portion of the system, and another in others. But it is more important to observe, that the

Pharisees succeeded in corrupting the ancient doctrine of the Jewish Church by the fatal operation of two of their leading principles,—*the merit of works to procure justification*; and *the worldly dominion of the Messiah*. The First led them to reject the doctrine of faith in Messiah's sacrificial death, through which all the ancient saints, in all ages, had sought justification before God; and the Second brought them necessarily to deny, that Messiah would suffer or die for any purpose, as incompatible with an advent which they expected to be ushered in by signs from heaven, and to lead to the restoration of their country to the highest dominion. Before these errors, the typical and evangelical character of the Mosaic institutions entirely vanished away; the ceremonial law was deprived of its meaning, and sacrifices were converted from acts of *faith* into *works* of legal obedience; the performance of which went to swell the supposed merits of the offerer, and to secure his acceptance, on the ground of his personal righteousness, as manifested by his strict ceremonial observances. Notions of the perpetuity of the Mosaic institutions, human meritoriousness, and a worldly redemption, began from this time to prevail among the Jews every where, under the influence of Pharisaism; and will easily account to you for the ill reception which the doctrine of Christ and his Apostles met with among them in general, and among the Pharisees in particular.

A.—This removes a difficulty which I have sometimes felt in attempting to account for the absence,

among the Jews of our Lord's time, of all apparent acquaintance with the doctrine of salvation by faith in an atonement prefigured by the sacrifices of the law which they still continued to offer. I now see that such views and the tenets of Pharisaism were entirely incompatible; and that from the great influence of the Pharisaic system upon the body of the people for near three centuries, the doctrines of the Jewish Church must have been awfully obscured and perverted.

B.—You have rightly conceived the case. But to proceed with the leading public events of Judea: In the contests for the chief power in Judea, which occurred among the descendants of John Hyrcanus, the Romans began decidedly to interfere. Pompey the Great, in supporting one of these princes against another, besieged and took the city and the temple. The proud Roman pressed even into the Holy of holies, and was surprised to find no statue or symbol of the Deity there. The temple was then immensely rich; for though its treasures had often been seized, they were always replenished by the voluntary offerings of the Jews throughout the world. Pompey, however, nobly respected them, and placed Hyrcanus, a descendant of John Hyrcanus, in the chief government as High Priest, but without the regal diadem. Gabinius, a Roman commander, afterwards deprived the High Priest of his civil authority; but it was restored to him by Julius Cæsar for the part he took in his favour, in the great contest between him and Pompey, which

divided and convulsed the whole Roman empire. Afterwards Antigonus, the last remaining branch of the Asmonean race, seized the sovereignty; but he was dethroned and killed by the Romans, who supported Herod, afterwards called the Great, and who was the last independent sovereign of Judea. The attachment of the Jews to the race of their Asmonean princes, rendered Herod's possession of the throne, as an Idumean, insecure, although he had married into the Asmonean family; and he only sustained his power by many intrigues, and by murdering several of the members of the rightful royal family. He made, however, successful court to Augustus Cæsar, and was confirmed in his sovereignty by him. His mind was rendered dark and melancholy by his family vexations, and by a deeply troubled conscience, pressed by the weight of his many crimes; and his character, as well as his imitation of Roman manners and heathen customs, alienated still farther from him the affections of the Jews. To flatter and conciliate them, he added to many other splendid buildings, the rebuilding of their temple, on a scale of great magnificence. It was in the reign of this suspicious and sanguinary prince, that our Lord was born; and the order to destroy the children of Bethlehem, was at once accordant with his sanguinary character, and with the feelings of a mind, kept in the torments of jealousy by the conspiracies against him which were springing up among the members of his own family, and by his knowledge of the general dislike which was felt towards him by the Jews:

At length he died, worn out by painful diseases ; and with the blood of his own wife, his sons, and other relatives, as well as that of the *innocents* of Bethlehem, upon his tortured conscience.

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## CONVERSATION XIII.

HEBREW VERSE.—FIGURATIVE AND SYMBOLICAL LANGUAGE OF THE PROPHETS.—PROPHETIC STYLE.

A.—I THANK you for thus tracing the leading links of the chain of events, which connects the Old and the New Testaments ; I will now request you to answer me some questions with respect to the Book of Job, the Psalms, and the writings of the Prophets. They are, with a few others, I observe, sometimes called “the poetical Books” of the Old Testament ; but they have not the form of verse, although I perceive that their language is highly elevated, figurative, and indeed richly poetical.

B.—You will be sensible, however, in reading them, of a *rhythm*, and an approach to some kind of measure. That they are written in verse, all the learned are agreed, although the harmony does not arise from rhyme, that is, from the termination of the verses in corresponding sounds ; but probably from metres, the laws of which are now unknown. There is also observable a correspondence of verses to each other,

so that they may be divided and placed *parallel* to each other. This arrangement has been made by some translators ; and the parallels, so formed, have, according to their construction, received different appellations. However, to explain the matter generally, it will be sufficient to give you a specimen of what they have called *gradational parallel*, in which the second or responsive clause so diversifies the preceding one as generally to rise above it, forming a sort of climax :—

“ Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found ;  
Call ye upon him while he is near.  
Let the wicked forsake his way,  
And the unrighteous man his thoughts ;  
And let him return to Jehovah, and he will compassionate him,  
And unto our God, for he aboundeth in forgiveness.”

This is Bishop Lowth's translation of a passage in Isaiah iv. 6, 7, on which Bishop Jebb remarks : “ In the first line, men are incited to seek Jehovah on the bare intelligence that he may be *found* ; in the second, they are encouraged to call upon him, by the assurance that he is *near* ; in the third line, the wicked is warned to forsake his *way* ; in the fourth, the unrighteous to renounce *the very thought* of sinning ; in the last line, the *compassion* of God, mentioned in the fifth, is heightened into *overflowing mercy and forgiveness*.” Of other kinds of parallelism, such as present an anti-climax, or an antithesis or opposition, as

“ The memory of the just is blessed ;  
But the name of the wicked shall rot ; ”

the poetical books of the Hebrews afford very numer-

ous instances ; for which, and other peculiarities, you may consult Lowth on Isaiah, and Jebb's " Sacred Literature." You will, from the instances given, form a general idea of the structure of Hebrew verse.

A.—The style, too, of the Hebrew poets appears to be figurative and bold beyond that of any other human writers.

B.—It has all the splendour and sublimity, the softness and beauty, of the Oriental writers, without their exaggerations on the one hand, and their languor and voluptuousness on the other. This is itself a strong proof of what I before said, that, although the general genius of the east is seen in these inimitable compositions, and the different characters of the genius and taste of each individual are also conspicuous, yet is it manifest that the whole mind of every writer was in the hand and under the guidance of a superior power. But as the Prophets especially use not only figurative but also symbolical language, it will be necessary for you to become somewhat acquainted with the ELEMENTS, so to speak, of that rich, picturesque, and often typical, style, in which they address us.

A.—I wait for your illustrations.

B.—Nature is the great source from which the Hebrew poets, like all others, derive all their images ; but the *symbolical* character which they give to many natural objects, is generally peculiar to themselves, and results from their inspiration. The sun, moon, and stars, the highest objects in the natural world, figuratively represent kings, queens, princes, or rulers, or

the kingdoms themselves which they govern ; their increase of splendour denotes growing prosperity ; their being darkened by eclipses, or their setting, the reverses of their condition : “ I will cover the heavens, and make the stars thereof dark ; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light.” Ezekiel xxii. 7. Earthquakes, too, and the shaking of heaven and earth, are used to express commotions in kingdoms, or their entire overthrow. The sun stands as the emblem of Messiah, and light for the knowledge and joy which his doctrine should diffuse. Light and darkness are further used for joy or sorrow, prosperity or adversity : “ We wait for light, but behold obscurity ; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.” Isaiah lix. 9. Dews, moderate rain, gentle streams, and running, or, as the Hebrews called them, *living* waters, denote prosperity in general, and are especially used to express the blessings of the Gospel : So in Isaiah xliv. 3,—a passage in which we have an instance of the parallelism just mentioned :—

“ I will pour water upon him that is thirsty,  
And floods upon the dry ground ;  
I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed,  
And my blessing upon thy offspring.”

A.—I observe that the second couplet explains the figurative language of the first ; the copious effusion of *waters* in the former, signifying the *Spirit* and the *blessing* mentioned in the latter.

B.—But, on the other hand, immoderate rains and destructive floods represent God’s overwhelming judg-

ments : “ I will rain upon him an overflowing rain, and great hailstones.” Ezek. xxviii. 22. Fire also, whirlwinds, and “ the east wind,” or the suffocating and withering simoon, are all emblems of destruction : “ The wind shall eat up all thy pleasures.” Jeremiah xxii. 22. High mountains and lofty hills denote states and cities ; the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan stand for potentates and persons of the highest rank ; and towers and fortresses for powerful protectors. Lebanon, indeed, which was remarkable for its stately cedars and for its own loftiness, is used for any thing great and noble; and Mount Carmel, which abounded in vines and olives, denoted beauty and fertility : “ The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellency of Carmel.” The vine and the vineyard are constant images of the Jewish Church. But the treading of the wine-press denotes extreme punishment, the crushing of nations under the weight of the Divine vengeance, and the effusion of blood. A horn is the emblem of strength and dignity, sometimes of pride; and a rod, of royalty. Rams, bulls, lions, eagles, sea-monsters, and other creatures of pugnacious or ravenous habits, are used for cruel tyrants and conquerors : “ Hear this, ye kine of Bashan, which oppress the poor.” “ The lion is come up from his thicket.” Jeremiah iv. 7. “ A great eagle came from Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar.” Ezekiel xvii. 3.

A.—The splendid religious services of their country, I have also observed, afford the Prophets many interesting and expressive images.

B.—And they were the more expressive, as they were not mere poetic ornaments ; but in many instances established *types* of the subjects to which they refer. Hence, from the temple, the Shechinah, the mercy-seat, the sacrifices, and purifications, and the splendid garments of the High Priest, a variety of images are drawn serving to denote the glory of the Christian Church, God's presence with it, and his favour towards it : “ And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a fire by night ; for upon all the glory shall be a covering.” Isaiah iv. 5. “ Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.” Ezekiel xxxvi. 25. “ I clothed thee with broidered work.” “ He clothed me with garments of salvation.” Isaiah lxi. 10.

A.—Their striking and miraculous history would also, I presume, furnish them with figurative allusions.

B.—The exodus from Egypt is frequently made use of to express other great deliverances of the Jewish nation, and also of the Christian Church : “ Thus saith the Lord, who maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters.” Isaiah xliii. 16, &c. The descent on Sinai supplies also the imagery of many noble passages, as, “ Behold the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth ; and the mountains shall be molten under him.” Earlier events, also, are often alluded to ; as, the destruction of the Canaanites, of the cities of the plain, the general deluge, and the chaotic state of

the earth at its creation: “I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.” Jer. iv. 23. To these may be added, the fall of man, and of the evil angels: “Thou hast been in Eden, in the garden of God. Thou art the anointed cherub; thou wast upon the holy mountain of God.” Ezekiel xxviii. 14. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” Isaiah xiv. 12; where the Prophet speaks of the fall of the proud king of Babylon, under this bold allusion to the fall of Satan. The doctrine of the resurrection also supplies many figures by which the restoration of the Jews, and the revivals of religion in the Church, are represented; as in Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones.

A.—Metaphors taken from husbandry, I also have noticed to abound.

B.—Those of ploughing, sowing, and reaping, are frequent and obvious; but to understand some vigorous passages in which *thrashing* is introduced, you must recollect that this was generally, though not always, done by treading out the corn from the husk, by the feet of oxen, upon an elevated place, where the wind might take away the chaff: “Arise and thrash, O daughter of Zion, for I will make thy horn iron, and thy hoofs brass.” Amos ii. 13. “Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them.” Isaiah xli. 16. The pastoral images are very beautiful and tender: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.” Psalm

xxiii. Under the character of a shepherd, Isaiah also speaks of Messiah, in the following exquisite passage : “ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd ; he shall gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” The outward expressions of mourning were shaving the head and beard, rending the garments, retiring to the house-tops, (which were all flat,) and there pouring out lamentations. Dirges and laments, accompanied by a wailing kind of music, were also in use at funerals ; and these circumstances are also often introduced by the Prophets into their pictures of national distress : “ Every head shall be bald, and every beard clipped ; there shall be lamentation on all the house-tops of Moab.” Corn being ground in those early days, chiefly in hand-mills, by female slaves sitting on the ground, explains the apostrophe of Isaiah : “ Descend and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon ; take the millstones,” &c. The marriage relation supplied metaphors to express the covenant between God and his people ; and hence idolatry and other superstitions are so often, by the Prophets, called by the terms, adultery and fornication, by which the marriage covenant is violated. It is also one of those bold images so frequent in the Prophets, to represent the terrible effects of the Divine judgments upon a people by the stupefaction caused by intoxicating liquors : — “ Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness, with the cup of thy sister Samaria.” Ezekiel xxiii. 33. For further elucidations I must refer you to those who have

written upon Hebrew poetry; but this may be sufficient to give you a general view of the sources from which the Prophets especially drew their imagery. If I point out also a few passages which will give you an idea of the beauty, richness, and grandeur of their compositions, it may draw your attention to this interesting part of Holy Writ. The poets of Palestine soar far beyond the most admired geniuses of paganism; and the most vigorous conceptions of Homer and Virgil are tame and puerile when compared with those of the Hebrew Prophets.

A.—In this I shall be greatly interested; as I doubt not you will point out these particulars with truth and judgment.

B.—My credit will not be great; as I shall do little more than furnish you with a few specimens, chiefly suggested by the criticisms of men of taste and learning on these majestic books of Holy Scripture. Turn then to Isaiah v., where, after the Jews have been reproached for various sins, their offended God threatens them with his judgments. Read verse 13, where captivity and famine appear with all their horrors, and the threatened calamity is spoken of in the past tense, according to the manner of the Prophets, to denote its certainty.

A.—“Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.”

B.—“Hell,” meaning hades, or the grave, like a

ravenous monster, opens wide its jaws, and swallows down its myriads. Verse 14.

A.—“Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.”

B.—Distress lays hold on all ranks, and God is glorified in his judgments, until the whole land is left desolate, a place for flocks to range in. Verses 15—17.

A.—“And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled; but the Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.”

B.—After several other reproofs and threatenings, the God of armies, having hitherto corrected to no purpose, is represented, with inimitable majesty, as only lifting up his ensign, and hissing to the nations, when the hostile legions, like swarms of insects, fly to his standard; and keen, cruel, and resolute, they hasten to perform his will upon a guilty race, and leave the land desolate and dark, without a ray of comfort to cheer the gloom: Verses 26—30.

A.—“And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly. None shall be weary or stumble among them; none shall slumber or sleep: Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows

bent ; their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. They shall roar like the young lion, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea ; and if one look to the land, behold, darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof."

B.—From this scene of terror and gloom, proceed now to the following chapter, (vi.,) which describes the designation of Isaiah to his office.

A.—" In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims : Each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

" And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts : The whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

" Then said I, Woe is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

B.—This prophetic vision is peculiarly glorious. " The most pompous machinery of the Greek and

Latin poets is as much inferior to it as earth is to heaven, or things human to things Divine. Observe the *personages* : They are the very highest in the scale of created beings,—the dominions and principalities of heaven :—Their *attitude* : They stand before the throne of Jehovah, veiling their faces from the beams of uncreated glory, too bright for the seraphim themselves to endure :—Their *action* : The most rapturous songs of praise :—Their manner of *expression* : Re-iterated and reverential acclamations of, ‘Holy! holy! holy!’ —the *effects* of this awful presence, and of these august sounds : The posts of the door shake ; the ponderous and magnificent pillars of brass (2 Chronicles iii. 17.) tremble as a leaf before the blast of the desert. The temple, too, involved in smoke, joins with trembling columns and adoring seraphs to bid the thoughtless world stand in awe of God !”

In the thirteenth chapter the destruction of Babylon is foretold, and the very name of the conquerors, the Medes, is mentioned; then but a very insignificant people. Of this chapter read the tenth and the thirteenth verses.

A.—“ For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light ; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.”

B.—Read also the concluding verses.

A.—“ And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God

overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there; but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there, and the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their palaces," &c.

B.—Here, you observe, God himself is introduced in person, declaring, by a variety of the most striking images, the destruction of Babylon, and the everlasting desolation of that great city. Never was a description of any object of terror worked up to such a pitch as this, even to the falling of the stars, and the removing of the earth out of its place. And in about 200 years the prophecy was accomplished. This great city, *the glory of kingdoms*, sixty miles in compass, inclosed with a wall, by the lowest account, two hundred feet high, and fifty broad, so that six chariots could drive abreast on it; fortified every where with towers, and secured by a hundred gates of brass; a city whose beauty, strength, and grandeur, whose temples, palaces, and hanging-gardens, were the wonder of the world,—became as the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah. All is mouldered into dust, and sunk into a morass; and, as the Prophet foretold, the place where it stood is occupied with all manner of wild beasts and serpents: And thus it must ever continue; for it is doomed *never to be inhabited*. The few masses of ruins

which remain the Arabs call by an expressive name which signifies *overturned*. When we compare such predictions with the event, what awful ideas do they give of God ! what loud warnings to fear his judgments !

The prediction as to Babylon is followed in the fourteenth chapter by a triumphant ode. Turn to the passage which commences at the fourth verse.

A.—“Thou shalt take up this parable against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased ! the golden city ceased ! The whole earth is at rest and is quiet : They break forth into singing ; yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming. It stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth : It hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak, and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we ? Art thou become like unto us ? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols : The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning ! How art thou cast down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations ! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven : I will exalt my throne above the stars of God : I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north : I will ascend above the heights of the clouds : I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of

the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms ; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof ; that opened not the house of his prisoners ? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave, like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit ; as a carcase trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial ; because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people : The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children, for the iniquity of their fathers ; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of Hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and son and nephew, saith the Lord. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water : And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

B.—The scenes, speakers, and transitions of this ode, have been well pointed out by Lowth and Michaelis, in the extract which I shall now read :—

“ A chorus of Jews is first introduced, expressing their surprise and astonishment at the sudden downfall of Babylon, and its oppressive tyrant. The harassed kingdoms, and their rulers, denoted by the fir-trees and cedars of Lebanon, shout with joy, and the whole earth

and its productions raise their voice along with them over the fallen tyrant ; and vaunt of their security, now he is no more. The scene is then changed, and a new set of persons introduced : The regions of the dead are laid open, and Hades is represented as rousing up the shades of the departed monarchs. They rise from their thrones to meet the king of Babylon on his arrival, and insult him on his being reduced to the same abject condition with themselves. This is one of the boldest figures ever attempted in poetry, and is executed with astonishing brevity, perspicuity, and force. You are to form to yourself an idea of an immense subterraneous vault, a vast gloomy cavern, all around the sides of which there are cells (in the manner of the Jewish sepulchres) to receive the dead bodies : Here the deceased monarchs lie in a distinguished sort of state, suitable to their former rank, each on his own couch, with his arms beside him, and his chiefs around him. These illustrious shades rise at once from their couches, and advance to the entrance of the cavern to meet the king of Babylon, and to insult him on his fall. The Jews now resume the speech : They address the king of Babylon as the morning-star fallen from heaven, the first in splendour and dignity, fallen from his high state : They introduce him as uttering the most extravagant taunts of his power and ambitious designs in his former glory, which are strongly contrasted in the close with his present low condition. Immediately follows a different scene, happily imagined to diversify the same subject : Certain persons are introduced who

light upon the corpse of the king of Babylon, cast out and lying on the bare ground ; so disfigured among the common slain, that it is some time before they know him. They accost him with the severest taunts, bitterly reproach him with his destructive ambition, which brought upon him so ignominious an end, and leave him with execrating his name, race, and posterity. To complete the whole, God is introduced declaring the fate of Babylon, the utter extirpation of the royal family, and the total desolation of the city ; the deliverance of his people, and the destruction of his enemies ; confirming the irreversible decree by the awful sanction of his oath.

“ The images of this ode are so various, so numerous, and so sublime ; expressed with such force, in such elevated words, figures, and sentences, that it is impossible to conceive any thing of the kind more perfect. We hear the voices of the Jews, the cedars of Lebanon, the king of Babylon, the ghosts of departed monarchs, and those who find the king’s corpse ; and we behold each of them acting his respective part, as it were in some well-cast drama. The persons are numerous, but not confused ; bold, but not extravagant ; a noble, sublime, and truly Divine spirit glows in every sentence ; nothing can be found deficient, nothing redundant ;— in a word, for beauty of disposition, strength of colouring, greatness of sentiment, brevity, perspicuity, and force of expression, this ode of Isaiah stands among all the monuments of antiquity unrivalled.”

The style of JEREMIAH is also exceedingly beautiful

and tender ; and, towards the close of his prophecies, he ascends to the majesty of Isaiah.

A.—Be pleased to point out a passage or two in illustration.

B.—You may turn to chapter xlvi ; which contains a prophecy delivered previous to the great battle fought by Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar, in which the Egyptians were routed with great slaughter. The Prophet sees the mighty but vain preparations of the Egyptian warriors. Verses 3—6.

A.—“ Order ye the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle. Harness the horses, and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets ; furbish the spears, and put on the brigandines. Wherefore have I seen them dismayed and turned away back ? and their mighty ones are beaten down, and are fled apace, and look not back ; for fear was round about, saith the Lord. Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape ; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates.”

B.—The king of Egypt is however represented as marching with all the confidence of victory, like a river overflowing its banks. Verses 7, 8.

A.—“ Who is this that cometh up as a flood ? whose waters are moved as the rivers ? Egypt riseth up as a flood, and his waters are moved like the rivers, and he saith, I will go up, and will cover the earth ; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof.”

B.—The voice of Pharaoh is heard animating his troops to the battle. Verse 9.

A.—“Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans that handle the shield; and the Lydians that handle and bend the bow.”

B.—The Prophet, however, announces to him, that this is the time and place destined by God for the entire overthrow and destruction of his host; and in the description, the sword itself is personified,—it devours, and satiates itself, and is made drunk with blood. Verse 10.

A.—“For this is the day of the Lord God of Hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: And the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood; for the Lord God of Hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.”

B.—Finally: The wound inflicted upon Egypt is without cure, although the balm of Gilead, the most sanative medicine known in that day, were applied to it. Verse 11.

A.—“Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: In vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured.”

B.—As a further specimen of Jeremiah’s manner, we may take the forty-eighth chapter, which contains prophecies concerning the Moabites and other neighbouring nations, who fell under the irresistible sweep of the power of Nebuchadnezzar. This whole chapter is poetry of the first order. It opens with the distress of the cities of Moab, which fell successively under the power of the invader. The cry of one city taken and sacked resounds to that of another; the wailing of

the children is also touchingly introduced ; the highways resound with cries of trouble ; and the country, swept of its inhabitants, is left like the heath of the desert. Verses 1—6.

A.—“ Against Moab thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel : Woe unto Nebo ! for it is spoiled : Kiriathaim is confounded and taken : Misgab is confounded and dismayed. There shall be no more praise of Moab : In Heshbon they have devised evil against it : Come, and let us cut it off from being a nation. Also thou shalt be cut down, O Madmen ; the sword shall pursue thee. A voice of crying shall be from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction. Moab is destroyed ; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. For in the going up of Luhith, continual weeping shall go up ; for in the going down of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction. Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness.”

B.—The folly of trusting in idols is next forcibly portrayed ; their great idol Chemosh himself is carried into captivity, with his whole retinue of priests, and the princes of the people. Verse 7.

A.—“ For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken : And Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together.”

B.—Wings are then scornfully ordered for Moab, as her only chance of escape ; and the victors are heard animating each other in the pursuit, and imprecating

curses on the man who executes his work with slackness. Verses 9—10.

A.—“ Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away: For the cities thereof shall be desolate, without any to dwell therein. Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully; and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.”

B.—The subject is diversified by the introduction of a spirited comparison taken from old wine long left undisturbed, and thus acquiring strength and flavour; by which is indicated the pride and insolence produced in the Moabites by long prosperity. Verses 11—13.

A.—“ Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; neither hath he gone into captivity: Therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles. And Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Beth-el their confidence.”

B.—All prosperity is now declared to be at an end, and the neighbouring states are called to sing the lament at his obsequies. Verse 16.

A.—“ The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hasteth fast. All ye that are about him, bemoan him; and all ye that know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod !”

B.—And lest any of the cities of Moab should flatter

themselves with the hope of an exemption from this calamity, the Prophet represents the inhabitants of Aroer and Arnon, the extreme borders of Moab, eagerly inquiring of the trembling fugitives, male and female, “What is done?” to which the answer is, that the destruction is universal upon all parts of the kingdom, and upon all its cities. Verses 19—24.

A.—“O inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way, and espy; ask him that fleeth, and her that escapeth, and say, What is done? Moab is confounded; for it is broken down: Howl and cry; tell ye it in Arnon, that Moab is spoiled. And judgment is come upon the plain country, upon Holon, and upon Jahazah, and upon Mephaath; and upon Dibon, and upon Nebo, and upon Beth-diblathaim, and upon Kiriathaim, and upon Beth-gamul, and upon Beth-meon, and upon Kerioth, and upon Bozrah, and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far and near.”

B.—The severity of this fearful visitation of the Divine judgment is then heightened by various images. Moab is seen as the object of contempt and derision, like a reeling drunkard. Verse 25.

A.—“The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the Lord. Make ye him drunken; for he magnified himself against the Lord: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision.”

B.—The enemy falls upon the summer fruits, so that the rejoicings of the harvest cease, and shouting is no longer heard in the fields; the public services of religion cease, and one dark affliction is spread over the whole land. Verse 33.

A.—“ And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab ; and I have caused wine to fail from the wine-presses ; none shall tread with shouting, their shouting shall be no shouting. Moreover, I will cause to cease in Moab, saith the Lord, him that offereth in the high places, and him that burneth incense to his gods.”

B.—Thus, in these and other of the Prophecies of Jeremiah, found in the close of his Book, this Prophet falls but little short of the spirit, variety, and sublimity of Isaiah himself.

A.—The Lamentations of Jeremiah over the sad accomplishment of his own predictions in the destruction of Jerusalem, preserve all their pathos to the present day.

B.—“ He witnessed all the horrors of the famine, and, when that had done its work, the triumph of the enemy. He saw the strong holds of the city cast down ; the palace of Solomon, the temple of God, with all its courts, its roofs of cedar and gold, levelled to the earth, or committed to the flames ; the sacred vessels, the ark of the covenant itself, with the cherubim, pillaged by profane hands. What were the feelings of a patriotic and religious Jew at this tremendous crisis, he has left on record in his unrivalled elegies. Never did city suffer a more miserable fate ; never was ruined city lamented in language so exquisitely pathetic. Jerusalem is, as it were, personified, and bewailed with the passionate sorrow of private and domestic attachment ; while the more general pictures of the famine, the common misery of every rank, and age, and sex, all the desolation, the

carnage, the violation, the dragging away into captivity, the remembrance of former glories, of the gorgeous ceremonies, and the glad festivals, the awful sense of the Divine wrath heightening the present calamities, are successively drawn with all the life and reality of an eye-witness. They combine the truth of history with the deepest pathos of poetry.”\* Of the truth of this remark, the following passages will afford sufficient proof. Under what a variety of affecting views is the calamity presented, and how deep is the tone of sorrow which pervades the whole! “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger! And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: He hath destroyed his places of the assembly; the Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised, in the indignation of his anger, the king and the priest. Her gates are sunk unto the ground; He hath destroyed and broken her bars; her king and her princes are among the Gentiles; the law is no more; her Prophets also find no vision from the Lord. The Elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: They have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground. Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my

\* Milman.

liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mother's bosom. What thing shall I take to witness for thee? What thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea; who can heal thee? All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call, The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?"

A.—Are not the writings of EZEKIEL considered obscure?

B.—Often so; but on the obscurity of prophecy I will speak presently. The sublimity of Ezekiel is of the kind which is sometimes called *the terrible*; it is at least often calculated to fill the mind with the deepest awe. The vision, in the first chapter, which you may peruse at your leisure, is of this description. The Prophet here receives his commission, and has a symbolical vision of the glory of God. A firmament likened to the colour of the terrible crystal, from its intense brightness, stretches above the heads of cherubim, having symbolic forms denoting boldness, activity, intelligence, and heavenly-mindedness; these celestial beings, glowing with the splendour of heaven,

“run and return as the appearance of lightning.” The office assigned them is that of attending the chariot of God’s providential march among the nations of the earth. “The wheels” are awfully lofty in their sweep, complicated in their motions, so as to appear often “a wheel within a wheel;” but they are “full of eyes,” to show that every motion is directed by infallible intelligence. A mighty spirit, too, is in the whole; and wherever it moves, accompanied by the cherubim, the noise of their wings is “like the noise of many waters, as the voice of the Almighty, as the voice of speech, as the noise of a host;” simile after simile suggesting itself to the mind of the Prophet, to express the *rush* of mighty and irresistible energy, and of rapid and unwearyed service. But the picture is not finished: Above the firmament appears the throne of God, managing and directing those wondrous motions which are performed in a lower region; and on the throne “the likeness of a man,” an anticipation of our Lord’s entrance into his glory, to whom “all power is given in heaven and in earth,” and about the throne “a rainbow” of intense brightness, crowning the whole with the beauteous symbol of the covenant of mercy.

A.—Well might the Prophet “fall upon his face” before so glorious a vision;—a vision too, which, as you have opened it, suggests the most profound and overwhelming thoughts.

B.—If you turn to the twenty-sixth chapter, you will find a prophecy of the destruction of the celebrated mercantile and opulent Tyre; a city which had been

enriched by the long and gainful commerce of the old world. It was taken nineteen years afterwards by Nebuchadnezzar ; but a part of the inhabitants retired to an island half a mile from the shore, where they built New Tyre, which was afterwards captured by Alexander the Great. The prophecy respects both, and expresses particular circumstances of the calamity (all of which were afterwards exactly accomplished) with wonderful force and graphic effect. We seem to see the Babylonian host raising the mounds, setting the engines, and shaking the walls ; we hear the noise of horsemen, and the sound of chariots ; we see the clouds of smoke and dust ; the sword appears bathed in blood, and the groans of the dying fall upon the ear. “ He shall cast up a mount against thee, and shall set engines of war against thy walls, and shall break down thy towers. By reason of the abundance of his horses, their dust shall cover thee ; thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates.” Tyre then immediately disappears ; her towers sink into the earth, and her very dust is buried in the sea : Nothing remains but the bare rock. “ They shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses ; and they shall lay thy stones, and thy timber, and thy dust, in the midst of the water. And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease, and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard ; and I will make thee like the top of a rock. Thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon : Thou shalt be built no more : For I, the Lord, have

spoken it. But read the latter part of the chapter, from the fifteenth verse to the end.

A.—“Thus saith the Lord God to Tyrus, Shall not the isles shake at the sound of thy fall, when the wounded cry, when the slaughter is made, in the midst of thee? Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and put off their broidered garments. They shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit upon the ground, and shall tremble at every moment, and be astonished at thee. And they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and say to thee, How art thou destroyed that wast inhabited of seafaring men, the renowned city, which wast strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, which cause their terror to be on all that haunt it! Now shall the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure. For thus saith the Lord God, When I shall make thee a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep upon thee, and great waters shall cover thee; when I shall bring thee down with them that descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old, with them that go down to the pit, that thou be not inhabited; and I shall set glory in the land of the living; I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more; though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God.”

B.—How striking is this scene! “The isles and adja-

cent regions shake, as with a mighty earthquake, by the concussion occasioned by the fall of Tyre. The groans of the dying reach the ears of the people inhabiting those regions. Their princes, alarmed for themselves, and afflicted for Tyre, descend from their thrones, and clothe themselves—with sackcloth? No; but ‘with trembling!’ Arrayed in this astonishing attire, the Prophet introduces them as a chorus of mourners, lamenting Tyre, in a funeral song, or dirge, as customary on the death of renowned personages. And, pursuing the same image still farther, she is brought forth from her place in solemn pomp; the pit is dug deep for her, and she is buried, to rise no more. Such is the prophecy concerning Tyre, comprehending both the city on the continent and that on the island; and punctually fulfilled in regard to both. That on the continent was rased to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar; and that on the island, by Alexander. The latter used all the stones, rubbish, and earth of the old city, in making a causeway to join the continent to the island; by which means he became master of the city, and fulfilled that part of the prediction which says that her very dust should be scraped together, and her stones, her timber, and her earth, laid in the midst of the waters. At present, and for ages back, this great city, once the emporium of the world, is literally what the Prophet repeatedly foretold,—a bare rock, *a place to spread nets on.* ‘I visited,’ says Maundrell, ‘the ruins of Tyre; a mere Babel of broken walls, pillars, and vaults, without so much as one entire house.

Its present inhabitants are only a few poor wretches, (harbouring themselves in the vaults, and subsisting chiefly upon fishing,) who seem to be preserved in this place by Divine Providence, as a visible argument how God has fulfilled his word concerning Tyre, that it should be *as the top of a rock, a place for fishers to dry nets on.*”

A.—I have noticed a very striking prophecy respecting the king of Egypt, in the thirty-second of Ezekiel.

B.—It affords another instance of the sublimity of inspiration. The fall of this mighty sovereign is predicted under the appropriate figures of a lion, which infests the woods; and a crocodile, an amphibious animal, found in the river of Egypt; and a sea monster, pursuing his prey in the still wider waters; caught, slain, and left a prey to the fowls and beasts. The figure is then changed, and Pharaoh’s fall, and that of his nobles, is compared to the extinguishing of the greater and lesser lights of heaven, plunging the whole land in darkness. Verses 7—8.

A.—“ And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark: I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light: All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God.”

B.—This prophecy was fulfilled in the conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, after he had taken Tyre; and the prophetic ode, which commences at the seventeenth verse of this chapter, may be considered as a finished model in that species of writing which is appropriated to the exciting of terror; and bears a strong

resemblance to the passage from Isaiah, just pointed out, in which the king of Babylon is represented as going down into Hades. This passage of Ezekiel is even more crowded with terrific circumstances. God is introduced, ordering a place in the lower regions for the king of Egypt and his host. The Prophet delivers his message, pronounces his fate, and bids those who buried the slain drag him and his multitudes to the subterraneous mansions. At the tumult and commotion which this mighty work occasions, the infernal shades are represented as roused from their couches to learn the cause. They see, and hail the king of Egypt, and again lie down in the slumbers of death. Pharaoh being now introduced into this immense subterranean cavern, the Prophet seems to lead him all round the sides of the pit ; shows him the gloomy mansions of former tyrants, lying with their weapons of war beside them, and their swords under their heads, as in bitter mockery of their former prowess ; pronounces the names of each, as he goes along,—Ashur, Elam, Meshech, Tubal, Edom, the princes of the north, the pomp and pride of all past ages ; and concludes with showing Pharaoh the place destined for him in the midst of them, where he must henceforth lie down in humiliation and silence with all his multitude. You seem to follow the steps of the Prophet, and the disembodied Pharaoh, in breathless silence ; and shudder, whilst you pass by the couches of once mighty kings, who, with their immense armies and innumerable subjects, all lie gathered into these vast regions of silence and death ; but with “ their

iniquity upon their bones," till the trump of God shall call them to judgment.

A.—I hope I shall now read this part of the Sacred Writings with more attention than before.

B.—Innumerable instances might be given of the pathos, the beauty, the vigorous delineation, and the sublimity of the poetic parts of Scripture; but the subject is large, and I must recommend you to read them yourself with a fixed design to enter into their meaning, and to mark the force and appropriateness of their figures, and of the imagery in which they clothe their vast conceptions; using such helps as you can at any time meet with.

A.—May I ask what was the intent of the prophetic dispensation; and for what practical ends, predictions of the lot of various nations were recorded?

B.—Not, certainly, to gratify that curiosity of man which delights to look into future events; but for the most important ends connected with the faith, obedience, and comfort of mankind.

A.—They are always referred to, I perceive, as one of the proofs of the Divine authority of the doctrines of those who delivered them, and of the books they wrote.

B.—And do you not perceive the irrefragable force of this argument?

A.—I suppose it lies in this, that none but God can foresee the future; and, that as these predictions were uttered in indubitable prescience of future events, their authors must have been under the direct inspiration of God.

B.—But the argument may be more fully developed. Certain knowledge of the future, we are sure, is not possessed by man. The only thing that approaches to it, is a probable *inference* how men will act, or how known circumstances may, in certain cases, affect their feelings and volitions; which inferences are drawn chiefly from past experience and observation. These conjectures, however, go but a little way; and the event, from the intervention of unforeseen circumstances, often refutes the calculations of the wisest and most observant mortals. But when events, many years or ages distant, are predicted, depending upon causes not so much as existing when the prophecy was uttered, and upon a great variety of circumstances, and a long arbitrary series of things, and the fluctuating uncertainties of human volitions; and especially when they depend not at all upon man as their contriver, but arise wholly out of the counsels and appointment of God himself; it is then most manifest, not only that they proceed from an intelligence superior to that of man, but from that Being who alone is clothed with the attribute of a perfect omniscience.

A.—Please to state some instances in illustration.

B.—The flood was predicted more than a hundred and twenty years before it came, and could not be the result of conjecture, since it depended wholly upon a miraculous interposition of God. The promise of Canaan to the seed of Abraham was given several centuries previous to its accomplishment; and who but God could foresee that the numerous offspring of

the then childless and aged Abraham, himself but a wandering shepherd, should possess it? The capture of Jerusalem by the powerful Babylonians might be a matter of reasonable conjecture; but who could foretell above two hundred years before, that the Medes, then a weak people, should conquer Babylon? Or who could write in Isaiah's prophecies the very name of Cyrus, so long before he was born; and foretell that this Cyrus should liberate the Jews from captivity, and command their temple to be built; or indicate the manner in which Babylon should be taken, namely, by the diversion of the river Euphrates from its channel, and leaving open the gates leading from it through the neglect occasioned by a drunken festival, but He who "calls things that are not as though they were?" Who could foretell that the descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs of the desert, should remain an unsubdued and a predatory people, as they are to this day? or would have dared to say that the Jews, though dispersed throughout the known world, should remain a distinct people as we see them to this moment; among nations, too, into whose common mass the most distinct tribes and nations have sunk, and are now undistinguished?

A.—Is there not a curiously minute instance in the case of the Rechabites spoken of by Jeremiah, to whom it was promised, "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever?"

B.—There is; and the more minute the circumstances of a prophecy are, the stronger is its evidence.

Here more than two thousand years ago, a single tribe, distinguished by drinking no wine, and by refusing to live in houses, receives a promise of being perpetuated as a distinct race, retaining the same habits as their fathers : And to this day they are found, few in number, it is true, but still existing ; called by the same name, and distinguished by the same peculiarities, as in the days of the Prophet. But, to go to larger events equally beyond the reach of human conjecture : Daniel prophesies of the rise and successive fall of four great monarchies. The Babylonian was to be displaced by the Medo-Persian,—that by the Macedonian,—and that by the Roman, which was ultimately to be divided into kingdoms, as we all see it at this day. Think then for a moment of the infinite number of events which went to produce these results, and of their contingency,—the workings of ambition,—the achieving of victories,—the plottings of policy,—the concurrence of favourable circumstances, often apparently accidental,—and the struggles with adverse events, which this succession of nations to universal empire, three of whom were in their earliest infancy when the prediction was uttered, implied. Think of the knowledge which it supposes of the volitions of an almost infinite number of men,—of the working of their passions,—of the conflicting of their interests,—of even the little and apparently fortuitous events, by which their counsels were often swayed, their interests affected, and their battles lost or won ; and instead of resting in human foresight, you are irresistibly lost in the per-

fectness and comprehension of the foreknowledge of God.

A.—Then, besides many others, there are the prophecies respecting Christ.

B.—Yes : Answering to that anticipation excited by prophecies commencing with Adam, and enlarged upon by all the Prophets in succession, and which no delay could extinguish, at last comes a Deliverer, a Restorer, a Redeemer ; nor is it pretended that any one who has yet appeared, except our Saviour, puts forth the least claim to be the person referred to in all these ancient and successive vaticinations. This itself is remarkable : But when you take also into account, that the *time* of his coming was fixed by Daniel,—that the *place* of his birth was named by Micah,—that his *tribe* and *family* were also pointed out,—and that the circumstances of his *birth, humiliation, teaching, miracles, rejection, crucifixion, ascension*, and future *glory*, are in prophecy given with the accuracy of history,—so that the life, character, and work of Jesus of Nazareth have precisely answered to all these prophecies, and fulfilled them ; no doubt can remain, but that those “holy men of God” who spake of him, were “moved by the Holy Ghost.”

A.—This I feel to be indubitable ; but how has prophecy, as you have said, served to confirm the faith of men in the revelations of God in all ages ?

B.—We can at least trace this effect throughout the post-diluvian world. The accomplishment of the predictions of Noah as to the flood, gave the stamp of Divine authority to the doctrines which he as

“a preacher of righteousness” taught; and with this impress they were transmitted to his descendants. The fulfilment of the predictive promise, as to the possession of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, confirmed the Abrahamic and Mosaic doctrines as being from God; the fulfilment of all the prophecies of the Hebrew Prophets respecting the captivity, the rebuilding of the temple, the destruction of Tyre, the conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, the subversion of Babylon, and then of the Medo-Persian empire, placed the seal of truth upon the mission of those Prophets, and authenticated their moral and religious doctrines among the Jews after the captivity. The coming of Christ, and the fulfilment of ancient prophecies in Him, have added the most illustrious evidence to the Divine authority of the Old Testament; whilst the no less marked accomplishment of the predictions of our Lord himself, as to the destruction of Jerusalem, those of St. Paul respecting the great apostasy, and those of St. John in the Revelation, as far as they are not yet manifestly future in their application, have given equal authentication to the New Testament.

A.—And I perceive that this is a kind of evidence which has gathered force from age to age; and that the fulfilment of what is still future will give still greater weight to the proof.

B.—Doubtless it will; and when antichrist, both Papal and Mahometan, shall be destroyed; when the Jews shall acknowledge Christ, and the Gospel be preached unto all nations, then shall “the mystery of

God" be fulfilled; and before this grand demonstration of the truth "of all that the Prophets have spoken," we should say that all infidelity must at once be silenced, did we not know that this mental vice results not now from want of evidence, but from a worldly and corrupted heart. The effect however will be great and general, and ultimately universal;—"every mouth shall be stopped," and unbelief will in lowly shame confess its guilt before God.

A.—This leading purpose of prophecy was, indeed, worthy of so extraordinary a dispensation; but, perhaps, it might be designed to answer other purposes.

B.—Doubtless; and those also very important. The successive prophecies respecting Messiah continually exhibited the glory of his person, work, and redemption, to the faith of ancient saints; just as the developement of his great designs in the conversion of the world, displays new glories to our view, and excites a stronger faith, and a livelier hope. Besides, as both the ancient saints, and those who have believed in Christ since his coming, have often seen truth in fearful contest with error, and the Church environed with enemies, and those of the most formidable kind; prophecy has in all ages been a source of comfort, by revealing the final issue of things. The general meaning of the unaccomplished predictions could not be mistaken even by the mass of unlearned believers; and in all ages, and especially in times of discouragement, and persecution, and apostasy, it must have been a source of great comfort to them, as it is to us, to know

how the grand contest between the powers of light and darkness will terminate; that the cause of our glorious Redeemer shall finally triumph over every nation; and that “he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.”

A.—Has it not been objected, that the prophecies are obscure?

B.—They are obscure to those who are not attentive to prophetic figures and symbols, which we may call *the language of prophecy*; and also to those who do not consider the times and circumstances in which they were written, and which give the key to their meaning. This, however, is the fault of the reader. There is also, no doubt, a designed obscurity in many of them, that their meaning might not be obvious, at least in all its parts, until after the accomplishment; in order that the freedom of human actions should not be interfered with. Unfulfilled prophecies are, for this reason, often obscure to us in every thing beyond their general import; but many ancient prophecies were of a very explicit kind, and had no obscurity of meaning; and others are still difficult only as to the *time* and *manner* of their future accomplishment.

A.—I have heard of prophecies having a double sense. What may this mean?

B.—The term is not a happy one; but it marks that great peculiarity of Scripture prophecy by which it was often intentionally applied to two or more events, so as to have a lower application to one, and a higher to another; a near and a distant fulfilment; a temporal and

a spiritual one. So the seventy-second Psalm is a prediction both of the glory of Solomon's kingdom, and also of the higher glories of Messiah's reign. The prophecies respecting Babylon apply literally to that ancient empire, and mystically to antichrist; the predictions of our Lord respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, refer also to the end of the world; and thus we find terms and phrases in such prophecies which are to be applied, some to the lower, some to the higher event contemplated; and to distinguish these requires great sobriety of judgment. The restoration of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, was also typical of their spiritual restoration as a Church in the latter days, and the prophecies in many parts appear to respect both. "There are," as Lord Bacon finely observes, "springing and germinant accomplishments throughout many ages, though the light and fulness of them refer to one age." This peculiarity in prophecy appears to have resulted from that system of types, of which we before spoke, and by which certain events and things were made symbols of others to take place under the evangelical dispensation. It may also be of service to you to recollect, that the Prophets often use definite numbers, as three and seven, for an indefinite number; that, as to time, a day is often used for a year; that things future are often spoken of as past, to denote their certainty; that when they speak of "the last," or "latter days," they always mean the days of Messiah; that with them, north, south, east, and west, are generally to be understood with respect to

Judea, or Jerusalem; that by "the earth," they frequently mean the land of Judea, or the great continent of Asia and Africa, to which they had access by land; and that by "the isles of the sea," they understood the places to which they sailed, as Europe and the islands and sea coasts of the Mediterranean. The spirit of prophecy, however, no doubt, in many passages, comprehends more distant places, though geographically unknown to the Prophets themselves.

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## CONVERSATION XIV.

BOOK OF JOB.—PSALMS.—PROVERBS.—ECCLESIASTES.—

CANTICLES.—THE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE PROPHETIC BOOKS, WITH BRIEF NOTICES.

A.—I THANK you for the information afforded by the last Conversation; and beg now to make some inquiries respecting several Books of the Old Testament separately. Pray, who was the author of the book of Job?

B.—It has been by some ascribed to Moses; by others a lower date has been assigned to it, but without evidence. The events and conversations it records manifestly took place in an age anterior to the time of Moses, although we should allow it to have been composed by him in Midian; for the supposed allusions it contains to the subsequent history of the Israelites, are very fanciful and unfounded. Its age may be fixed somewhere between the time of Abraham and Moses;

and there is no sound reason why we should seek any other author than Job himself, whose name it bears. It presents us with an important proof, that, in the patriarchal ages, those in every place who retained the knowledge of the true God, held precisely the leading doctrines which are found in the Old Testament Scriptures ;—satanic agency ; the subjection of evil spirits to the power of God ; the unequal distributions of rewards and punishments in the present life, unless, as in the case of the Mosaic law, the contrary is secured by a special covenant ; the doctrine of piacular sacrifice ; the expectation of a Redeemer ; the resurrection of the body, and a future judgment. It is in particular an early illustration of the truth, that the sufferings of good men are permitted for their moral improvement, and that the providence of God is not only general, but special and particular. The land of Uz, in which Job dwelt, is Idumea in Arabia Petræa. The language of the Book is pure Hebrew, which, for a long time, was the common dialect of the Israelites, Idumeans, and Arabs. This makes it the more probable that Job was a descendant of Abraham. This poem you will find rich in beautiful and sublime passages, and it gives us a high idea of the intellectual refinement and taste of the pastoral tribes of the ancient world, whom the conceited philosophers of modern times delight to represent as but a remove from the state of savages. Writing was manifestly known in the time of Job, who mentions it ; and for this reason those who will have this art to have been first taught by Moses, place the book itself, in order to

serve their theory, later than Moses; but as the law appears to have been legible to Moses and to the people without a miracle, we must suppose them already to have been acquainted with the art of writing. This Book was probably introduced among the Israelites by Moses as a sacred composition.

A.—Was David the author of the whole Book of Psalms?

B.—He wrote so many of them, that the whole collection bears his name. Seventy-one are ascribed to him; several to Moses; and the rest to different authors who lived at different times, as low as the captivity. Of these we have the names of Asaph, Heman, Ethan, Jeduthan and the three sons of Korah. The whole collection is referred to by our Lord as prophetic, and this determines its inspiration. This, too, was the uniform judgment of the Jewish Church. The Psalms were not written only for private use, although, in some instances, they were suggested by private feelings and circumstances; but were for the most part designed for the public worship of the tabernacle and temple, and were adapted, therefore, to be sung with the accompaniment of musical instruments. To the present day they retain their power; and can never lose it so long as the perfections of God, the glory of his works, and the conflicts of his Church retain their interest in our minds; and so long as penitential sorrows are felt, and mercies, spiritual and temporal, affect us with gratitude, all the varied emotions which true, but often conflicting, piety excites in the heart, will in them find their

most appropriate expression. “ This little volume,” says Bishop Horne, “ like the paradise of Eden, affords us in perfection, though in miniature, every thing that groweth elsewhere, every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food ; and, above all, what is there lost, but here restored,—‘ the tree of life in the midst of the garden.’ That which we read as a matter of speculation in the other scriptures, is reduced to practice when we read it in the Psalms : In those repentance and faith are described, in these they are acted ; by a perusal of the former we learn how others served God, by using the latter we serve him ourselves.”

A.—What is the meaning of the word SELAH, which so often occurs in the Psalms ?

B.—It is generally taken to be a musical term, directing the performance when sung. An eminent Jewish critic, however, explains it to be both a musical note, and a note of emphasis. It is derived from a verb which signifies, *he raised* or *elevated* ; and, in his judgment, denoted both the elevation of the voice in singing, and at the same time indicated remarkable sentiments, and directed to the raising of the heart, in the devout consideration of the subject last mentioned.

A.—The Book of PROVERBS was written by Solomon.

B.—And stands as a noble monument of his inspired wisdom. It is a difficult matter to make a proverb, for it must be at once so just, useful, and so universally applicable, that all shall perceive and admit its force. The most profound knowledge of human nature and human things, therefore, was requisite to produce these

little gems of opinion on various subjects. Like real gems, too, they are conveniently portable, and by all men are esteemed to be of a value which the smallness of their bulk does not diminish.

A.—I have seen a book entitled, “A Collection of the Proverbs of all Nations.”

B.—But when you take away from it the Proverbs of Solomon, and all modern imitations of them, you will find very few remaining, except those which are echoes of each other. The invention of a very few proverbs entitled a man in former times to the appellation of *wise*; but Solomon wrote “three thousand proverbs,” which possess too an astonishing variety, whilst not one of them is founded upon an unsound principle. Take the proverbs of other nations, and you will find great numbers founded upon selfishness, cunning, pride, injustice, and national contempt and animosities. The principles of the Proverbs of Solomon are piety, charity, justice, benevolence, and true prudence. This their universal purity proves their inspiration.

A.—You have said that you thought it improbable that the Book of ECCLESIASTES was written at the close of the life of Solomon, because it bears no marks of personal contrition before God.

B.—It rather appears to be the production of a better period of his life, since its object is to show the vanity of earthly things; to inculcate the fear of God, and the necessity of seeking true happiness in a future state. It refutes Epicurean and sceptical objections; and its difficulty arises principally from the rapid suc-

cession in which these objections and their answers occur, without any mark to distinguish them but their own internal evidence. Solomon had gone too far into worldly pleasures and the excesses of oriental magnificence, when he left us his impressive sentiments on the vanity of external enjoyments. He wrote, probably, during one of those pauses in his downward career, which were produced by the reproofs of conscience; and had he fully listened to them, they would have preserved him from that awful apostasy from God into which he subsequently fell.

A.—What is your opinion of the *SONG OF SONGS*?

B.—That it is an inspired book; because it was placed in the sacred canon by Ezra, and was uniformly acknowledged so to be by the Jews. Its immediate occasion was the marriage of Solomon, not with an Egyptian princess, as is sometimes said, but with a lady of his own country, of which there is internal evidence; and under this was couched mystically the covenant relation of God and the Jewish Church, of which marriage is often made the emblem in other scriptures; where, however, it is not extended so largely into allegory. The style is pastoral, and more strongly oriental than that of any book of Scripture.

A.—Have we the Books of the Prophets in the Old Testament, in the chronological order in which they wrote?

B.—Not exactly so. The earliest is *Jonah*, the Prophet sent to the inhabitants of Nineveh. Then comes *Amos*, who lived between 810, and 785 B. C. Contem

porary with him was **HOSEA**, both of whom prophesied to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. **ISAIAH**'s time comes down a little lower, to 698 B. C. He boldly reproves the sins of his nation; calls to repentance; comforts the pious by the most illustrious prophecies of **Messiah**, and the glories of the Christian Church; and utters several most explicit predictions respecting the destruction of Babylon, Tyre, the Philistines, and other nations, all of which were remarkably fulfilled, about two hundred years afterwards. **JOEL** was contemporary with **Isaiah**. His style is highly wrought, and marked by elegance and perspicuity. He exhorts the people to repentance on account of a famine brought upon the land by the palmer worm, &c.; and, in an affectingly descriptive manner, denounces a plague of locusts which was to succeed if they remained impenitent. He couches, under the image of this plague, predictions of the wasting of the land by the invasion of the **Babylonian** armies; and thus affords another instance of the double application of prophecy to two distinct events. In the close of the second chapter he has the celebrated prediction of the effusion of the **Holy Spirit**, quoted by **St. Peter**, in his sermon on the day of **Pentecost**; after which follows a highly sublime prophecy of the subsequent destruction of **Jerusalem**, and the wonderful deliverance of the **Christians**, described as persons who "call upon the name of the Lord." **MICAH** lived in the same age, and invites the people, both of the kingdoms of **Israel** and **Judah**, to repentance, in foresight of the judgments to be inflicted by the **Assyrians** upon the

one, and by the Babylonians upon the other. In this Book is contained the celebrated prophecy which marks BETHLEHEM as the birth-place of the future Messias. NAHUM lived about 715 B. C., and predicts the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, with wonderful minuteness and power. He is distinguished for ardour and sublimity. ZEPHANIAH a little preceded Jeremiah, and like him calls the people to repentance, and predicts the Babylonian captivity. The time of JEREMIAH extends from 628 to 586 B. C. His Book is a collection of important prophecies, delivered at different times, intermixed with historical narrative. HABAKKUK was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and, though in a brief manner, dwells with great force on the same subjects,—the wickedness of the Jews, their captivity, the destruction of the Babylonish empire, and their deliverance. There is great grandeur in his imagery. The date of DANIEL is from 606 to 534. He was one of the captives, but raised to high rank in Babylon, as his history records. The Persian monarchs continued him in his honours. As a saint, a statesman, a patriot, a Prophet, a confessor, and, but for a miracle, a martyr, he is equally conspicuous. Besides his splendid prophecies respecting the great successive monarchies of the earth, he records that it was announced to him by the angel Gabriel, that the holy city should be rebuilt and peopled, and should continue for seventy prophetic weeks, or 490 years, after which it should be destroyed for putting the Messiah to death.

A.—How does the accomplishment appear?

B.—The commencement of this period is fixed at the time when the order was issued for rebuilding the temple in the seventh year of Artaxerxes. Seven weeks, or forty-nine years, was the temple in building. Daniel ix. 25. Sixty-two weeks, or 434 years more, bring us to the public manifestation of Messiah at the beginning of the ministry of John Baptist; and one prophetic week, or seven years, will bring us to the time of our Saviour's death, or the thirty-third year of the Christian era,—in all 490 years according to the prophecy.

A.—How explicit and convincing is this!

B.—Beside these predictions, Daniel foretells the rise and destruction of antichrist; the latter state of the Roman monarchy; the invasions of the Saracens and Turks; and the final triumphs of Christianity. EZEKIEL was also one of the captives in Babylon, but carried away in one of the earlier deportations. Ezekiel's predictions support those which Jeremiah was still pronouncing in Judea. He denounces with unsparing words the sins of the people, predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, and the complete subjugation and captivity of all the people; then speaks of the ruin impending over the Moabites, Edomites, Philistines, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt; announces the restoration of the Jews; and, under the mystical representation of the building of a most spacious temple, represents the enlargement and glory of the Christian Church in the last days. HAGGAI lived after the return from the captivity, and reproves the people for their delay in rebuilding

the temple, and has some illustrious prophecies of Christ. ZECHARIAH, a contemporary, urges the Jews to the same hallowed and patriotic work. He has also several predictions respecting the four monarchies, and the conquest of Syria, &c., by Alexander the Great; and then rises, like several of his predecessors, into predictions, yet unaccomplished, respecting Christ's kingdom, and the conversion of the Jews. MALACHI closes the train of the illustrious choir of those extraordinary men, the Hebrew Prophets, on whose writings history has ever been pouring its light, and will continue to comment, as the great course of events runs on, till "time itself shall be no longer." MALACHI's date is from 436 to 420 B. C. He was commissioned to reprove the Priests and the people for their irreligion, more particularly after Nehemiah's second return; to whose efforts in effecting his pious reforms, the inspired authority of Malachi was made subservient. As "all the Prophets give witness to Christ," so Malachi foretells his advent, and the mission of his harbinger, John. Thus in these brief notices you have placed before you the succession of the Prophets of Israel and Judah, whose predictions the Holy Spirit directed to be recorded, and preserved in the Church. To peruse them with full satisfaction, you must have recourse to the best commentaries.

A.—Was there not something singular in the manner in which they often delivered their messages from God, or their "burdens," as I see they are sometimes called?

B.—They often taught by expressive action. To impress the people with their state of danger, and thus to awaken them to repentance, they walked about in sackcloth. Jeremiah made bonds and yokes, and put them on his neck, to intimate the absolute subjugation of the nations to Nebuchadnezzar ; and he took a potter's vessel and broke it to pieces in the presence of the princes of Jerusalem, to denote the complete destruction of that city. This mode of instruction by signs, was familiar among eastern nations.

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## CONVERSATION XV.

THE NEW TESTAMENT. — MANUSCRIPTS. — VARIOUS READINGS. — ENGLISH TRANSLATION. — POLITICAL CHANGES IN JUDEA. — SCENES OF OUR SAVIOUR'S MINISTRY. — FACE OF THE COUNTRY. — OUR LORD'S MIRACLES. — JOHN BAPTIST.

A.—IN reading the New Testament I will make memoranda of such questions as I wish to propose to you, in the hope that you will be kind enough to favour me with your answers.

B.—Most gladly ; only, as I stated before, you must be satisfied with brief replies, as I profess only to afford you some little assistance in reading and thinking for yourself, and to prepare you for consulting expositions.

A.—I subscribe to your condition with gratitude. My first question then is, Why are the writings of the first four authors in the New Testament called *Gospels*, and themselves *Evangelists*?

B.—Because the word *Gospel* signifies *good news*, and an *Evangelist* is *a publisher of good news*. Thus the term *Gospel* is often used to designate the whole Christian system, and every Preacher of the *Gospel* is, in a large sense, an *Evangelist*. The four accounts of the life of Christ are however called “*Gospels*” by way of eminence, because “*the glad tidings*” of our salvation are founded upon his incarnation, doctrines, works, death, and resurrection, all which they record.

A.—Were there no other histories ever written of the life and actions of our Lord?

B.—Yes, many; as it is natural to suppose, from the eagerness with which the first Christians every where would inquire after such accounts. Some of these are still extant, mingled more or less with vague reports and fables; but four only, two written by Apostles, Matthew and John, and two by companions of Apostles, Mark and Luke, were ever received as of *inspired* authority by the Church; and these were quoted, and appealed to as such, in the earliest ages.

A.—Do the *Evangelists* copy from each other?

B.—Certainly not, for the *Gospels* bear all the marks of having been written without any concert. This is proved by the variations which appear when they narrate the same events, or give the same parables and discourses, which, when in substance the same, are

varied as to circumstances, one omitting what the other inserts, and the contrary ; just as you might expect from four unconnected persons of integrity relating the same occurrence, each dwelling most forcibly on that which at the time was most noticed by him ; and stating that which he remembered best.

A.—Is it not easy to conceive that the Holy Spirit might have influenced one Evangelist to give the whole series of the actions and discourses of our Lord, in a full and complete manner ?

B.—No doubt ; but it is not for us to prescribe how God shall instruct us. Doubtless the best methods were chosen ; and we see especially the wisdom of God, in giving us the testimony of four separate and independent writers, whose very manner of giving the account proves, that they did not act in concert, to impose a fabulous history upon mankind.

A.—I have often felt that the Gospels afford strong internal evidence of their authenticity, from the natural manner in which every thing is stated.

B.—This is a very convincing consideration. There is no *art* discoverable in the whole ; no attempt to exalt their master by laudatory remarks ; no expressions of wonder to call the reader's attention to what is indeed wonderful in itself ; no extenuation of their own ignorance, and faults, and those of their fellow-disciples ; no bitter censures of the persecutors of their Lord, or of their own. Perhaps the freedom of the Gospels from all these interlocutions not only gives greater credibility to them ; but proves, that as many of

those effusions of feeling were such as the circumstances were calculated very naturally to call forth, and might have been properly enough indulged in, by merely human writers, their absence is only to be accounted for from that control of inspiration under which they wrote. The whole is a narrative “of the things which Jesus said and did,” delivered in the simplest conceivable form.

A.—The publication of the Gospels so early appears also to have been wisely ordered.

B.—Manifestly so; for although Christianity had been largely propagated and received by thousands and tens of thousands who had been witnesses of the facts they recorded, or had received them from the Apostles and first disciples, before the Gospels were written, they were all published before those persons had passed away who might have contradicted them; and they were received as authentic histories by multitudes who had the means of knowing the truth of their statements. St. Matthew’s Gospel was written first; not later than A. D. 37. St. Mark’s Gospel about A. D. 60. St. Luke’s about the same time; and St. John’s a little later. The three first dwell more at large on the discourses and actions of Christ in Galilee; St. John, more particularly on those in Judea and Jerusalem. Two facts are always to be remembered, as connected with this subject: First, that Christianity had formed large and flourishing Churches in Jerusalem and other places, on the ground of the very facts reported in the Gospels being true, (for they had too many witnesses to be con-

tradicted,) before a single Gospel was written ; and, Second, that they were all published before that generation had passed away, which had witnessed the things recorded.

A.—In what language were they written ?

B.—In Greek ; as being well-known in Judea, Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, and even in Italy : So that in no language at that time so universal, could they have been composed. But translations of them into the vernacular tongues of all these countries were rapidly made.

A.—Before printing was discovered, all books would of course be written : Are the original manuscripts of the Gospels in existence ?

B.—No ; but many hundred copies of them still exist ; and also of translations which were made from still older copies of the originals, as high as the second century : And the agreement of the most ancient versions with the Greek manuscripts now in being, shows that the latter were faithfully transcribed from still older manuscripts, as those were from the originals themselves.

A.—But I have heard of a great number of “ various readings ; ” that is, as I understand it, verbal and other differences between these manuscripts of the Books of the New Testament, produced by the mistakes of transcribers, or from a difference in the copies. How does this circumstance affect the received text ?

B.—The various readings do not in any degree affect the credit and integrity of the text ; the general uni-

formity of which, in so many copies, scattered through almost all countries in the known world, and in so great a variety of languages, is truly astonishing ; and demonstrates the veneration in which the Scriptures were held, and the great care which was taken in transcribing them. Of the hundred and fifty thousand various readings, which have been discovered by the care and diligence of those who have compared numerous manuscripts with one another, not a hundredth part make any perceptible, or, at least, any material, variation in the sense. The reason they are so numerous is, that every the minutest deviation has been noted ; as, the insertion or omission of an article, the substitution of a word for its equivalent, the transposition of the place of a word, and even variations in orthography. Where the sense is at all affected by a different reading, it is generally of little importance which reading is adopted ; as, to give one instance, whether we read, “Paul, the *servant*,” or “Paul, the *prisoner*, of Jesus Christ.” In the very few instances which affect any important doctrine, the doctrine does not rest alone upon them ; but is found in many other passages, about which there is no doubt.

A.—There are, I presume, various readings of other ancient books ; as, of Homer, Terence, &c.

B.—Yes ; and it is from the light afforded by this variety, that critics have been able to establish a purer text. Those authors which were most read and copied have the greatest number of various readings : But the true text of such books is, for this reason, the better ascertained ; whilst the text of all books of which but

few manuscripts have been found, remains obscure and unsatisfactory in many places, for want of the means of more extensive comparison of one reading with another; from which the true reading so often breaks forth with such irresistible evidence, as to be universally received by scholars. Apply this well-known and established literary fact to the Scriptures. No books were ever so early or so widely spread, or so often transcribed; nor have the various readings of any ancient books been sought after with so much pains and scrupulosity. "The consequence is," says a critic, "that of no ancient books whatsoever do we possess a text so critically *correct*, so satisfactorily *perfect*, as that which exists in the best editions of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures."

A.—Is not our English translation greatly admired?

B.—It is; and justly so. No translation bears a higher character: And it is wonderful how little the language has changed, since this translation was executed by forty-seven learned men, in the reign of James I.; or, indeed, since the time of Tyndal, whose translation was the first English one made from the Greek; Wickliffe's being from the Latin Vulgate. A few words which occur in it are, however, antiquated; as "leasing," for *lies*; "daysman," for *umpire*; "carriage," for *baggage*; "eschew," for *avoid*; "wist," for *know*; "all-to," for *entirely*: And a few terms were formerly used in a more extended sense than at present; as "lust," for *desire* of any kind; "conversation," for the *whole conduct*.

A.—It was in the reign of Herod the Great that our Saviour was born; but when he was put to death, Pilate, a Roman Governor, held Judea: What political changes took place, after Herod's death, in the Jewish state?

B.—Herod reigned thirty-four years, and the national independence terminated with him; according to the prophecy of Jacob, that, until Shiloh came, the sceptre should not entirely depart from Judah. For when Herod divided his dominions among his three sons, he assigned Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, to Archelaus: But he was deposed by Augustus; so that Judea became a Roman province before our Saviour entered upon his public ministry. Herod Antipas the Third, son of Herod the Great, received Galilee, with the title of Tetrarch. He married Herodias, the wife of another brother, Herod Philip, and was reproved for it by John the Baptist; who was on that account put to death by this prince, in the manner related in the Gospels. It was to this Herod that Pilate sent Jesus, conceiving him to be a Galilean, and therefore his subject. Pilate was the Roman Procurator of Judea, acting under the Proconsul of Syria. On a complaint made to the latter, of his unjust government, he was ordered to Rome, and banished to Gaul; where, it is said, he put himself to death. Herod Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great, was made king by the Emperor Claudius, and received a part of Judea; but, dying at the end of seven years, Judea again became a Roman province, and so continued till the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus.

A.—Some information as to the places which formed the scene of our Saviour's ministry would be interesting.

B.—The *Jordan* is the only proper river in Palestine; for the others are mere winter torrents. Having passed through the lake of Galilee, it loses itself in the Dead Sea, which covers the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This lake is sometimes called “the sea of Tiberias,” from a celebrated city in its vicinity. On its shores our Saviour chiefly resided during his ministry. It is sixteen miles long, and six broad. “Its broad surface,” says Dr. Edward Daniel Clarke, “covering the bottom of a profound valley, environed by lofty and precipitous eminences, added to the impression of a certain reverential awe under which every Christian approaches it, gives it a character of dignity unparalleled by any other scenery.” *Bethany*, the residence of Lazarus and his sisters, was two miles distant from Jerusalem; *Bethphage* lay between the two; *the Mount of Olives*, just outside of Jerusalem, across the brook Kedron; *Emmaus* was distinguished for its hot springs; *Ephraim*, to which our Lord retired after the raising of Lazarus, was a considerable city, eight miles north of Jerusalem. *Jericho* was nineteen miles from Jerusalem; and as the road to it was lonely and rocky, it was infested by robbers, and was made the scene, therefore, of the parable of the good Samaritan. *Bethlehem* was six miles from Jerusalem. In the country of Samaria there was *Sychem*, called in derision, by the Jews, *Sychar*, which signifies *drunkenness*. It was about forty miles from Jerusalem, and was the chief city of the

Samaritans, after the destruction of the city of Samaria by John Hyrcanus before mentioned. *Cæsarea* was built by Herod the Great, and was the general residence of the Roman Governors. It was thirty-five miles from Jerusalem. *Cæsarea Philippi* was in Upper Galilee. *Lower Galilee* was most honoured by our Saviour's presence; and so much did he reside there, that he was considered a Galilean. The population, according to Josephus, was very great, and its towns and cities numerous; so that he had greater opportunities of doing good, and was more out of the reach of the malignant Pharisees at Jerusalem. *Nazareth*, where he was brought up; *Capernaum*, which may be considered his home, for there he paid the tribute-money; and *Bethsaida*, were all in Lower Galilee. *Capernaum* was upon the lake or sea of Tiberias.

A.—What was the face of the country?

B.—Mountainous, with some considerable plains. The most remarkable plain was the great plain of Jezreel, or of Esdraelon, the Armageddon of the Apocalypse. "Here, in the middle of the land," says Dr. Clarke the traveller, "and in its most fertile part, the tribe of Issachar rejoiced in their tents. It has been the scene of many a memorable contest. Here Baruk, descending from Mount Tabor, discomfited Sisera: Here fell Josiah; and here, from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to the march of Bonaparte into Syria, warriors out of every nation have pitched their tents in this great plain; and have had their various banners wet with the dews of Tabor and Hermon."

A.—Have not infidels occasionally questioned the alleged fertility of the Holy Land?

B.—And have forgotten that its destitution of inhabitants, and its barrenness, are both an eminent fulfilment of the prophecies; for the land, as well as the people, were to be “smitten with a curse.” There are not, however, wanting indications of its ancient productiveness. “Under a wise and beneficent government,” says the intelligent traveller before quoted, “the produce of the Holy Land would exceed all calculation.”

A.—What do the Scriptures mean by “the former and the latter rain?”

B.—In the climate of Judea rains seldom fall, except in autumn and spring. The former rain falls about November, when they sow; the latter, in April, a little before harvest.

A.—Is not the country then injured by drought in summer?

B.—The heat is great, but the night-dews are very copious, and refreshing to vegetation. To them there are frequent beautiful allusions in Scripture. The cold of winter is rather severe.

A.—Our Lord wrought a greater number of miracles than any of the Prophets.

B.—As accrediting a far superior mission, and higher personal claims. Have you observed that he wrought them in his own *name*, and often without any reference to a higher power than his own; whilst the Prophets and the Apostles wrought them as instruments of another and a higher agency?

A.—This I had not remarked : But what am I to learn from it ?

B.—That they were *servants*, He the *MASTER* ; that they were *men*, and He *GOD*. Have you also considered how miracles prove a Divine mission ?

A.—I conclude that they do so by proving the presence of a Divine power, exerting itself in a manner superior to nature, or the power of man, and that in such a connexion with the ministry of his servants, as to be a manifest testimony from God himself to their mission, and the truth of their doctrine.

B.—You have answered correctly ; and you can point out the circumstances which prove “ the works ” of Christ to be real miracles ; that is, such as prove an immediate interposition of Omnipotence.

A.—The healing of the sick, the blind, the lame, by a word or touch, or, when distant, by an act of his will ; the calming of the sea ; the feeding of several thousand persons with a few loaves and fishes ; and the raising of the dead, are, doubtless, Divine works. But have not miracles been urged in proof of other religions ?

B.—They have ; but such pretended miracles have wanted characters which marked those of our Lord.

A.—Please to be more particular.

B.—In our Lord’s miracles you observe the following circumstances : They are such as cannot be resolved into trick, or even the influence of the imagination, which, on some diseases, has great power ;—they were wrought in the presence of multitudes ;—they were

continued throughout his public ministry of near four years ;—they were generally wrought on the spur of the occasion, so that there was no opportunity for collusion ;—they were done under the scrutinizing eye of envious but intelligent men, the Pharisees and Saducees, who, nevertheless, never denied them, but invented the wicked hypothesis, that they were wrought by the agency of an evil spirit. Neither *such* miracles, nor miracles done in circumstances so favourable to ascertain the truth of the alleged facts, were ever wrought in favour of falsehood.

A.—How are we assured that they have been rightly reported to us ?

B.—They were never denied by the Jews, not from want of inclination certainly, but because the witnesses of them were too numerous. The Gospels too, as we have seen, were published whilst multitudes were living who could have denied the facts had they not been unquestionable. This was especially the case with the Gospel of St. Matthew, published for the use of the Jewish Churches in Judea, within a very few years of our Lord's death. But before that was written, Christianity had been believed by many thousands in Jerusalem, and throughout Judea ; and as the claims of that religion to be of Divine authority were founded wholly upon its facts, their belief was the acknowledgment of them, as having been witnessed by themselves, or, as universally admitted in the country. The miracle of our Lord's own resurrection, indeed, confirmed them all, as that was confirmed by the gift of tongues

at the day of Pentecost ; by the miraculous powers given to, and exercised by, the Apostles and first Preachers of the Gospel ; and by the moral efficiency of that Gospel, which proof remains in full force to this day. It has always professed to save, and it has always saved, them that believe.

A.—The miracles of Christ were, I think, all benevolent, wrought for the salvation, not for the punishment or destruction, of men.

B.—They were ; for “ he came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”

A.—They were also very varied.

B.—This is an interesting circumstance. Some had a peculiar majesty, as when he walked on the sea, silenced the winds, calmed the waves by his word, and raised the dead ; some had great tenderness, as when he fed the five thousand who had been remaining long with him listening to his sermons, lest they should “ faint by the way,” on their return home. To the blind, the lame, and to those labouring under the awful visitation of demoniacal possession, he was specially pitiful ; and the sorrows of parents on account of their children and of other near relatives, arising from the affliction or death of their friends, never failed to excite his sympathies. Into how many sorrowing families his healing hand conveyed joy and gladness, a future world must declare ; for numerous as are the miracles which our Lord wrought, it is plain from the Gospels themselves, that comparatively few are separately recorded.

A.—In what sense did John the Baptist “prepare the way” of Christ?

B.—By his coming in the character of his forerunner, and thus fulfilling the prophecies. But especially by his being a mighty, and, to a great extent, a successful, Preacher of repentance. Several of the Apostles appear to have been prepared for the teaching of Christ by the ministry of the Baptist; and many who afterward received the Gospel from the Apostles had also been prepared for it by the convincing and humbling preaching of John and his disciples. “All the people believed that John was a Prophet,” and this acknowledged Prophet declared that Jesus was the Christ.

A.—We are also perhaps taught by the sending forth of John to precede Jesus, as a Preacher of repentance, that repentance, in all ages, is necessary to prepare the mind for a cordial embracing of Christ as our Saviour.

B.—This is an important truth. “Repent ye and believe the Gospel,” is the Divine proclamation, and Christ “absolveth” those only who “truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.” Wherefore, as our excellent Liturgy exhorts, “let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit.” Always remember, that there can be no true faith without true repentance; but that it is faith which is the immediate *instrumental* cause of our salvation.

## CONVERSATION XVI.

PARABLES.—CHARACTER OF OUR LORD'S DISCOURSES.—  
HIS TEMPTATION.—EXPULSION OF THE TRADERS  
FROM THE TEMPLE.—THE SABBATH.—SYNAGOGUES.  
—APOSTLES.—MARY MAGDALENE.—DEMONIACAL  
POSSESSIONS.—MISCELLANEOUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

A.—DID not our Lord teach principally by parables?

B.—He used that mode of teaching frequently; but probably not so often as those plainer didactic addresses of which we have specimens in the Sermon on the Mount, in his conversation with Nicodemus, and in the numerous discourses recorded by St. John. But whatever form of address he used, the character of our Lord's teaching was a beautiful and touching simplicity; an unspeakable grace; and pointed application without any apparent effort. It is wholly peculiar to himself, and in accordance with the calm majesty of a DIVINE Teacher.

A.—Was not the use of parables common among the Jews?

B.—The parable was a favourite mode of teaching, and had several recommendations when skilfully managed. It engaged the attention by its narrative character; it awakened curiosity to discover the hidden meaning; truth came with greater power when it was enforced by the circumstances of a well-constructed parable; the hearer, too, was often brought unawares to assent to a truth under this veiled form, which he

would not have admitted if proposed to him nakedly ; and he was thus made frequently his own reprobate. We have a striking instance of this in the case of the parable of the Prophet Nathan spoken before David.

A.—Are there any remains of this kind of teaching in uninspired Jewish literature ?

B.—There are ; but though some of them have a good moral, and others are delicately sentimental, or somewhat dignified, they bear no kind of comparison as literary compositions (to say nothing of their doctrinal inferiority) to the nature, life, grace, and appropriateness of the parables of our Lord.

A.—In lately reading several of the parables, I have, indeed, felt their great beauty and force. A few are, however, somewhat obscure. What plant does our Lord refer to, in the parable of the wheat and *tares* ?

B.—A pernicious weed, (*lolium temulentum*,) one of the grasses, which can scarcely be distinguished from wheat in the earlier stages of its growth.

A.—In the beautiful and affecting parable of the prodigal, so encouraging to the most unworthy to return to their heavenly Father, whom does the eldest son represent ?

B.—All those persons outwardly less sinful than others, who, presuming upon their superior virtue, cannot bear the doctrine which teaches that the vilest of men, if truly penitent, may find ready and gracious acceptance with God, through Christ, and be placed on an equal footing in the family of God with those whose external conduct has been more correct

A.—Why does our Lord so frequently found parables upon the notion of a king, or a king's son, going into a far country, and leaving his servants in charge of his affairs?

B.—In that age of the Roman power, it was common with the kings of Judea, Galilee, and all the neighbouring countries, or with their sons on their death, or in case of a disputed succession, to repair to Rome, and obtain the confirmation of their claims from the Emperor and Senate, as from a power which could not be resisted, and which haughtily set up or deposed kings at pleasure.

A.—This explains the matter clearly; for Herod the Great made a journey to Augustus for this purpose; and we find his sons and others frequently at Rome, endeavouring to court the favour of that great empire.

B.—They went to “receive a kingdom and to return.”

A.—But why are there so many allusions to feasts and marriages in the night?

B.—Because the principal meal of the Jews was in the evening; so that the light and joy within the house, in several of our Lord's parables, represent the felicities of heaven; and the “darkness without,” or the “outer darkness,” the miseries of those expelled, or shut out, from it.

A.—Have all the parts of a parable a moral or spiritual meaning?

B.—Not necessarily so; for often it is clear that the comparison holds good in one or a few points only, and the rest are introduced to complete the story or

narrative. Parables, therefore, must be interpreted with judgment and sobriety.

A.—But you mentioned the longer didactic discourses of our Lord.

B.—These are of the highest importance, and, though not parables, have figurative passages of exquisite beauty and force.

A.—Please to direct me to a few examples, for I delight to “sit at Jesus’s feet, and to hear his words.”

B.—By so doing, you will, like MARY, choose “that good part which shall not be taken away from you.” Let us then briefly consider the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord begins by pronouncing those “blessed” or happy, who are distinguished for spiritual affections and attainments; “the poor in spirit,” those who “mourn” in penitential sorrow, “the meek,” “the merciful,” “the pure in heart,” &c.; and thus He tacitly reproves that worldliness which was the besetting sin of the Jews, and the ultimate cause of their destruction. He then teaches his disciples the duty of public usefulness, and a holy zeal for the salvation of all mankind: “Ye are the salt of the earth;” “ye are the light of the world;” and so reproves that bigoted sectarian spirit of the Jews, which would exclude all but themselves from the benefits of Messiah’s kingdom, and extends “the love of our neighbour” to the duty of seeking the spiritual good of the whole human race, thus inculcating the noblest form of a public spirit. He proceeds to restore that law to the lustre of its original purity, which the Pharisees, who

professed most zeal for it, had obscured by their corrupt sophistry; and he so explains the commandments as to show that they respect not only outward actions, but the desires of the heart, in which they originate. Thus every “secret thought” is brought under the control of a law of perfect purity, which regards “anger” as “murder” and “lust” as “adultery.” He then enjoins the utter renunciation of sin, at any cost, though it should be like that of “plucking out a right eye,” or “cutting off a right hand.” He inculcates the love of our enemies, reproves ostentation in religion, and enforces purity of intention and humility; invites those who had been taught to make a show of their prayers, to secret devotion in the closet, by the assurance, that their “Father, who sees in secret, would reward them openly.” The tenderness of his expressions, when calling us to the use of private prayer, is, indeed, greatly affecting and encouraging. He, to whom we pray, is “our Father;” “He seeth in secret;” that is, he condescendingly regards our free and confidential closet exercises, and “rewards openly,” answers our prayers by preserving and blessing us in our intercourse with the world, and in the acts of our public life. Further, he enjoins heavenly-mindedness; and applies the true remedy to worldly and anxious cares by teaching the doctrine of a particular providence. This he does with an exquisite and beautiful simplicity which has no parallel. The time was summer; the country in which he was then teaching was distinguished for fertility; and the

flowers of the field unfolding their beauties under a summer sky, and the birds of the air, whose sprightly motions and songs showed that they felt no want, afforded appropriate illustrations of the care of God over his whole creation. “Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” “And why take ye thought” anxiously “for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” And the moral of the argument is as important as its illustration is convincing: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Our Lord’s manner of enforcing a duty is always peculiarly brief, but pointed and irresistibly powerful: “Judge not,” be not hasty to condemn: Why? “That ye be not judged; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,”—a truth often seen even in this life; but the terrors of a higher tribunal where we shall ourselves need mercy, warns us to be candid and forgiving to others. Prayer is enjoined; but how persuasive is the reason which our Lord offers to excite that entire trust in God with which it must be accompanied, in order to be acceptable! “What man of you, whom, if his son ask bread,

will give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him!" Various warnings follow, and encouragements to different duties; and the whole concludes with a striking comparison intended to show the blessedness of practical obedience to his doctrines, and the vain hopes of all who separate knowledge and practice. The man who *hears* and *obeys* the sayings of Christ, builds his house upon a rock, and descending rains, and rushing floods, and driving winds make no impression upon it, for it is founded upon a rock; whilst the mere doctrinalist builds upon the sand, and in the time of God's visitation, the trial which every man must undergo, his frail foundation sinks under him, and his hopes are frustrated, like the wreck of a house bowed down by the storm, and swept away by mighty inundations. Judea, it is to be noticed, was subject to very heavy rains, and among its hills the floods were violent. We may say of this whole discourse, that it gives such a picture of personal virtue, as was never before conceived or expressed; nor is it a mere ideal conception of an unattainable holiness. This great Teacher of whatsoever things are "pure," "lovely," and of "good report," died to obtain for us that grace, by which all this might be realized in the state of our hearts and the conduct of our lives. If you analyze the other discourses of our Lord, you will have equal reason to be "astonished at his doctrine."

A.—Has it not been said, that there exists a discrepancy between the teaching of Christ and of his Apostles in this,—that he speaks more of moral duties, and they of doctrine?

B.—This has been said by Socinians chiefly; who, as they reject the atonement itself and faith in it as the means of our acceptance with God, and speak largely of human virtue as that which recommends man to the exercise of the Divine mercy, very ignorantly or perversely set up one part of Christianity against another.

A.—Certainly, little as I know or ought to depend upon my own opinion, it appears to me that there is no *doctrine* of the Apostles which is not in the discourses of Christ; and that no *virtues* are enjoined by him, to which they do not give equal prominence in the practical part of their Epistles.

B.—Your observation might be abundantly verified by a comparison of passages; and all the real difference which does exist, accords perfectly with the different circumstances in which each was placed.

A.—Be pleased to explain this.

B.—Before our Lord's passion and ascension, the Christian system was not perfected, and therefore could not in all its *particulars* be *fully* announced. What therefore was peculiar to its complete manifestation, was reserved for the Apostles to place openly before the world; whilst in the sermons of Christ it is introduced incidentally and generally, or under the haze of mystical modes of expression, or in connexion with other

circumstances, which awaken attention in his hearers rather than satisfy it. Yet his uniform doctrine is, that he was to die for the salvation of men: that men were to be saved through faith in Him; that the gift of the Holy Spirit in its fulness was to be the fruit of his death and intercession; and that the regeneration of man's nature could be effected by this influence alone. These were the doctrines which the Apostles *after his death*; that is, after the great sacrifice had been offered; after the intercession of Christ in the holy place had commenced; and after the fulness of the Spirit had been poured forth; more largely dwelt upon, or rather Christ himself taught them more largely by his Apostles; for still it was Christ speaking to men *by them*.

A.—This many seem to overlook, though it exactly agrees with his own words: “I have many things to say to you; but you cannot bear them now.”

B.—As there was a fitness in the comparatively incidental and more obscure declaration of his sacrificial death, before it took place; so also there was an equally manifest fitness, that, in his larger discourses, he should dwell upon the spirituality of the law, and the various branches of inward and outward holiness. The end of his coming was “to establish the law,” by honouring its justice in his own death, and by restoring its dominion over the regenerated hearts of his disciples by his Spirit. Its bright and perfect holiness was therefore to be set forth without a shade; that men, convinced of their numerous and aggravated

transgressions against it, might be brought to repentance, and, cut off from all other hope, might fly to his mercy ; and also, that after their reconciliation to God through him, they might have before them the true standard of inward purity and outward righteousness, illustrated moreover and enforced by his own most perfect example.

A.—What is taught us by our Lord's temptation in the wilderness ?

B.—That our Lord was to be “ tempted in all points like unto us, yet without sin ;” and that we might look up to him “ for succour,” when we are tempted by the same evil spirit. From the circumstance that our Lord opposed to the different temptations of Satan, quotations from the word of God, as admitting of no appeal, and no gainsaying ; we are also taught, that the Scripture is our only rule of action, and that whatever would lead us to act contrary to that rule, is from Satan, and must be instantly resisted.

A.—Did not Satan know that our Lord was the Son of God, in the sense of his being Divine ? and if so, what hope could he have of succeeding in his attempt to induce him to sin ?

B.—Perhaps he had no hope of success, and his motive was merely to disturb and distress his pure and spotless spirit, which he was permitted to do as a part of our Lord's humiliation. Or, though he knew well that the Son of God was Divine, yet he might not know the mystery of the union of the human and Divine natures, and might vainly hope to entice the mortal

nature of our Lord, now weak and faint with long fasting, to some act, which, by infixing a stain upon it, might break that union, and frustrate the intent of the incarnation.

A.—When he promised our Lord the kingdoms of the earth, were they in his power to give ?

B.—Certainly not ; for, although he has great power *in* them, he has none *over* them. You are to remember that the devil's promises are always false ; for he is “the father of lies.” He promises every seduced sinner pleasure, and he finds only misery and wretchedness.

A.—What meant our Lord by driving the traders from the temple ?

B.—These were persons who sold animals for sacrifices, and intruded into the court of the people which was for the purpose of prayer only, where also they placed their tables for the exchanging of money. By this majestic act he showed that he was the Lord of the temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi : “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to *his* temple.” He says, therefore, “*My* house shall be called a house of prayer.” Thus he both proclaimed himself to be “the Lord of the temple,” and taught us to lay aside all worldly cares and thoughts when we come to his house to worship him.

A.—Our Lord wrought several cures on the Sabbath day, to the great offence of the Pharisees ; did he then design to relax the strictness of the Mosaic law in that respect ?

B.—Not at all ; for that law allowed of acts of

necessity and mercy; but he designed to rebuke the superstitious and hypocritical strictness of those pretenders to piety. The Sabbath, you recollect, is a part of the great *moral law*, written by the finger of God; which law, our Lord declares, he came “not to destroy, but to fulfil;” that is, to establish: So that its obligation rests upon Christians as well as upon the Jews. The day was changed from the last to the first of the week, in honour of our Lord’s resurrection, by the inspired authority of the Apostles, and was then called, “the Lord’s day.”

A.—I observe that the appellation, “a *ruler* of the synagogue,” occurs sometimes; what was his office?

B.—I have already mentioned the important institution of synagogues, which were places to which the Jews resorted for prayer, and to hear lessons read out of the law, and the other scriptures in order; which custom gave rise to the reading a first and second lesson among us. Each synagogue had rulers, whose business it was to appoint the reader, and to permit any fit persons to give an exhortation; upon which latter practice the *sermons* of the Christian Church were grounded. Each synagogue was also a court for deciding on petty offences, and the “rulers” had the power of inflicting scourging. We see our Lord reading the lesson and exhorting in the synagogue of Nazareth.

A.—The synagogues, you have said, were numerous.

B.—These important institutions were established wherever the Jews were spread throughout the world; and, since their dispersion, have been the great means

of preserving them as a distinct people. In Jerusalem, before its destruction, there were upwards of four hundred and fifty synagogues, many of them for the use of the Jews who came up from distant countries to the festivals, as the synagogues of the Alexandrians, Cyrenians and others. The rule indeed was, that wherever *ten* Jews were found, there a synagogue ought to be formed; but not by a smaller number. The Rabbins therefore said, “The Divine presence descends not but where ten are met together.” Our Lord, on the contrary, taught, and perhaps with reference to this notion, that where but “two or three” Christians were found, they should “meet together” in his name, for acts of public worship; and declares, that “he is in the midst of them.”

A.—What were the times of the synagogue worship?

B.—The Sabbath, and the second and fifth days of the week; and, I may also remark, that the simple worship of the synagogue, consisting in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and exhortation, was taken by the Apostles as the model of worship in Christian assemblies, and not the temple-service, which Popery afterwards imitated.

A.—The Pharisees appear to have been greatly offended at our Lord saying to the paralytic man, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

B.—Because they acknowledged Jesus to be a man only, and rightly said, that none could forgive sins authoritatively, but the offended party, God himself. But, you observe, our Lord vindicates his *power*; that

is, his *right* to forgive sins ; and thereby declares himself to be God, which they thought to be blasphemy, —as it would have been, had he not been so in truth.

A.—In addition to the Pharisees and Sadducees, Scribes and Herodians are also mentioned in the Gospels ; were these distinct sects ?

B.—The *Scribes* and *Lawyers* appear not to have constituted a sect, properly so called ; but were a body of men who made the sacred books their peculiar study, so as to enable them to comment upon them, and instruct the people. They were chiefly of the tribe of Levi. The *Herodians* were a political party, favouring Herod the Great, who was obnoxious to the people generally ; and they were inclined to support also the sovereignty of the Romans, which the Pharisees detested.

A.—Who were the *publicans* so often mentioned in the Gospels ?

B.—Tax-collectors, or those who farmed the taxes and customs of a particular district, and let them out to the collectors. Some of these were respectable men ; but the body was in ill repute for extortion ; and “publicans” are therefore generally ranked with “sinners.” Matthew was sitting by the lake of Galilee, at the receipt of custom ; that is, taking the duties on imported goods, when our Lord called him. He was, what we term, a customhouse-officer.

A.—Why were twelve of the disciples called *Apostles* ?

B.—The word means “a messenger.” They were selected by Christ in a very solemn manner, after he

had spent the whole of the preceding night in solitude and prayer. The intent was, that they, being always “with him,” might be instructed in his doctrines; be the witnesses of his miracles, and especially of his resurrection; and then go forth to publish the Gospel to the world. After the destruction of the Jewish polity, the Jews submitted themselves to a spiritual head, called the Patriarch of Tiberias; and those beyond the Euphrates, to another spiritual Patriarch, called the Prince of the Captivity. These Patriarchs had legates called “Apostles,” who visited the synagogues in every place and reported their state. This office is by some supposed to have existed before the fall of Jerusalem, where the centre of spiritual authority would be the Great Council or Sanhedrim. If so, our Lord took this office, as he did baptism, from the Jewish Church, and thus declared himself to be *the spiritual Head and Fountain of ecclesiastical authority* to his followers every where; and in this character sent forth his Apostles, not only to gather churches, but to visit and regulate them.

A.—Was Judas a good man when called?

B.—He was probably, like the rest of the Apostles, an honest inquirer after truth, and under good influence; but, being of a covetous disposition, and carrying the bag, containing alms for the poor, which our Lord and his Apostles distributed in their journeys, he began by pilfering that, and thus his easily besetting sin obtained the mastery, and so blinded his mind and hardened his heart that at last he sold his Master.

A.—A shocking instance this of the effect of covetousness !

B.—And of the obdurate and infatuating effect of all sin whatever, when indulged.

A.—Did not our Lord know that he would betray him ?

B.—Yes ; but his perfect foreknowledge does not prevent his dealing with us as free agents ; nor has it any influence upon our conduct.

A.—How is this ?

B.—Because the simple knowledge of my actions by another, whether this knowledge be foreknowledge or afterknowledge, is a thing manifestly independent of my own conduct. The actions of another can be influenced only by *persuasion* or *external force*, neither of which was applied to control the conduct of this false Apostle.

A.—This appears plain ; and I now perceive how men may do that which is according to God's foreknowledge, and yet be free agents ; that is, as they act spontaneously from their own wills and passions, they are still accountable and punishable. Am I right ?

B.—You have taken the just view of the case ; for to *foreknow* is surely not to *necessitate*.

A.—Jesus commended the faith of a centurion ; he was, I presume, a Roman officer ?

B.—Having the command, as the name imports, of a hundred men. This good man, like some others of his countrymen, was a convert to the Jewish religion ; that is, “ a proselyte.”

A.—In one of our Lord's tours in Galilee, I observe that he was accompanied by several female disciples.

B.—These had been cured of diseases, and of diabolical possessions. Several of them were women of property, and “ ministered to Him of their substance ;” thus he subsisted upon charity, and he “ who was rich, for our sakes became poor.”

A.—Among these was Mary Magdalene ; is she not the same woman who anointed our Saviour's feet, and is called “ a sinner ?”

B.—Of this there is no evidence. Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, the name of her city, was probably a very respectable woman, out of whom our Lord had cast “ seven devils ;” but this was no stain upon her moral conduct. It is therefore from a baseless tradition that the Italian painters have painted exquisite pictures of penitent dishonoured women, and called them *Magdalens* ; and somewhat of injury is done to her memory, by applying her name to this class of females. The conduct of our Lord to “ the woman who was a sinner ” in the house of the scornful and self-righteous Pharisee, is however an affecting instance of our Lord's compassion and graciousness to penitents of every class. He had, it seems, met with her previously, and had healed her broken spirit by an assurance of forgiveness ; and her washing his feet with tears and anointing them with fragrant oil, was the expression of her grateful love. Washing the feet with water, and anointing the head, were customary marks of civility to guests ; both of which Simon had omit-

ted: But she washed his feet with her very tears, and anointed, not his head, but his feet, with the unguent. "She loved much, for she had much forgiven," is Christ's defence of her conduct, and of his own in suffering her to approach him. He graciously accepts the offerings of love, even from the unworthy; and, lest her mind should be disturbed by the objections of the Pharisee, he repeats to her the assurance of forgiveness: "And he saith unto her, Thy sins are forgiven." "Thy faith hath saved thee: Go in peace."

A.—It is passing to a much less interesting topic; but how am I to understand, in this account, the expression, "She stood at his feet behind him weeping?"

B.—The Jews did not sit at their meals, but reclined on couches on one elbow, with their feet behind them bare. John, the beloved disciple, "lay in the Lord's bosom;" that is, he had the distinction of reclining on the same couch at meals, and immediately next to his Lord.

A.—Do not some writers attempt to explain the demoniacal possessions by supposing them to be cases of lunacy, and of some other forms of disease, which, in popular opinion, were produced by the influence of Satan?

B.—But they forget that the Evangelists in some passages distinguish these cases from lunacy and other diseases.

A.—And I think they must find it very difficult to explain why diseased men should ask our Lord whether

he was come “to torment them before their time ;” or how diseases should leave the bodies of men, and enter into a herd of swine.

B.—Absurdities of some kind always follow from forcing violent interpretations upon the plain words of Scripture ; and in attempting to escape from one difficulty, we plunge into such as are far more formidable. Perhaps these actual possessions were then specially permitted, partly for punishing a guilty people, partly that our Lord might visibly show himself to be that Seed of the woman who should “ bruise the serpent’s head.” We see his almighty power thus demonstrated ; and from Satan’s secret and invisible, but fatal, influence over the soul, we are thus encouraged to fly to Him for succour and victory.

A.—But, now we are on this subject, allow me to ask, Was there not a violation of the private property of the Gadarenes, in destroying the herd of swine ?

B.—It was unlawful to the Jews to keep and eat these animals ; and our Lord acted as Sovereign Lord in avenging his own law.

A.—He caused, also, the barren fig-tree to wither away.

B.—Yes ; but it was “by the way-side,” and not private property.

A.—What might the meaning of that act be ?

B.—The tree was an emblem of Jerusalem. He came to seek fruit where he might expect to find it ; “for the time of figs was not yet ;” that is, the time of gathering them had not arrived. So that, had it been a fruit-

ful tree, figs would have been found upon it, as well as leaves. And he said, "Let no fruit grow upon thee for ever," that he might instruct the disciples in the approaching fate of that city; which was arrayed with the leaves, the show of fruitful piety, but had become hopelessly barren, and was "nigh unto cursing."

A.—I was this morning much affected in reading that passage: "But when Jesus saw the multitudes, he had compassion on them; because they fainted, and were as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, and the labourers are few: Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth labourers into his harvest."

B.—Nothing is more calculated to convey a stronger impression of the wretched condition of men who have no sound religious instruction, than the image under which our Lord himself considered them, and commended them to our sympathies. "They are as sheep having no shepherd." Thus we ought, especially, to view the millions of the heathen world; and not only pray that labourers may be sent forth, but exert ourselves to send them forth, when they are called by "the Lord of the harvest." If the sympathy of our Lord at all influence our bosoms, we shall be most zealous and active agents in Missionary Societies, whose object is to provide shepherds for the wandering sheep, who may bring them into the pastures of the Church, and the fold of Christ.

A.—The five thousand people whom our Lord mira-

culously fed in the desert had, it appears, followed him thither: Why did our Lord withdraw from the more populous parts?

B.—Herod, having put John the Baptist to death, expressed a desire to see Jesus, perhaps to imprison him; and our Lord therefore left Galilee, over which Herod ruled, and withdrew to a desert near Bethsaida, within the tetrarchy of Philip. That the people followed him, was a proof of their eagerness to hear his word; his feeding them gave the testimony of a stupendous and most public miracle to his doctrine; and the disciples' being directed to make the people "sit down by companies" enabled them to ascertain their number with exactness.

A.—Is it not a singular circumstance, that He who could multiply a few loaves and fishes into so great an abundance, should have been so careful of the "fragments" which he ordered the disciples to gather up?

B.—It teaches us to waste nothing useful, and to unite liberality and frugality. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and yet he is careful of crumbs.

A.—When the Pharisees, after so many miracles performed by our Lord, ask of him "a sign from heaven," what did they mean?

B.—Some wonderful appearance in the heavens, or sound from the clouds; as fire, thunder, or voices like those which issued from Sinai, or as in the case of the fire which fell at the prayer of Elijah. Our Lord, in reply, directs them to "the signs of the times;" by which he probably meant to turn their attention to the

prophecy of Jacob before noticed : “ The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until SHILOH come.” Now He had come, that sceptre was rapidly departing ; for a part of the country was already a Roman province, and even Galilee and Decapolis were but nominally independent ; the tetrarchs being mere vassals of the Roman empire.

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## CONVERSATION XVII.

MISCELLANEOUS ILLUSTRATIONS OF TEXTS.—TRANSFIGURATION.—TRIBUTE-MONEY.—THE TWO DEBTORS.—FEAST OF TABERNACLES.—TEACHING BY FAMILIAR OBJECTS.—OTHER TEXTS ILLUSTRATED.

A.—OUR Lord says to Peter, “ Thou art Peter ; and upon this rock will I build my Church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Do not the Papists ground their notion of the supremacy of Peter, and of the Church of Rome, upon this passage ?

B.—Very absurdly so ; for there is no good evidence that St. Peter founded the first Church at Rome ; or, rather, the evidence lies against it. Then the rock could not mean Peter *personally*, who was in no higher sense *a foundation* than the rest of the Apostles ; for the Church is said to be “ built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.” In this sense, therefore, it has as many rocks, or foundations, as

there were Apostles and Prophets. When *one* foundation is spoken of, that is always said to be Christ ; and our Lord must therefore be supposed to refer to Peter's doctrine, as contained in the confession he had just made : “ *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God ;*” which is, indeed, our only rock.

A.—And the prophecy contained in our Lord's words has been eminently fulfilled ; for the Church continues to this day.

B.—Yes ; and that in opposition to “ the gates of hell,” all the forces which hell can pour forth from its gates ; if the metaphor be considered as taken from a large city, sending out its armies from its gates, to invade and destroy. She has survived all persecutions, and the most formidable leagues of the princes and kings of the earth. If, by “ the gates of Hades,” we understand *death*, then the meaning is, that the Church should be fed by living members from age to age ; and so should continue to the end of time. Her Prophets, Apostles, and most eminent ministers, have all passed through “ the gates of Hades,” and no more fulfil their offices on earth ; but, though the Lord “ buries his workmen, he carries on his work ;” and will do so to the end of time.

A.—What appear to be the ends designed by the transfiguration of our Lord ?

B.—Perhaps it was vouchsafed to afford support to his human nature, by the foretaste which he then had of that glory into which he was to ascend after his passion. It was designed, also, to confirm the faith of the

three great Apostles, “Peter, James, and John,” who were permitted to be present at this wondrous scene. This miracle was truly “a sign from heaven,” such a one as the Pharisees and Sadducees asked; but that which was properly denied to them who had hardened their hearts against the force of other evidence, was vouchsafed to the humble and teachable. So it is, that “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;” and that which he hides from the proudly wise, he “reveals unto babes.”

A.—But was it merely a *confirmatory sign*?

B.—It was instructive also. It marked the superiority of Christ “the Son,” to Moses “the servant.” The face of Moses shone, when he beheld the same excellent glory: Our Lord was immersed in it, and was arrayed with it. It shows, also, the subservience of the law to the Gospel. “Moses and Elias” appeared in this scene as doing honour to our Lord; and they entered with deep interest into the great subject of his “decease,” which he should accomplish at Jerusalem; —that sacrificial death to which their faith had always looked forward. As this was not a vision, but a real transaction, it pointed out, too, the glory of which even the body is capable, when it shall be raised from the dead; and it proved the conscious existence of spirits in a separate state of being. Moses was a disembodied spirit; Elijah a spirit inhabiting a body which had been taken up to heaven without seeing death.

A.—On the subject of the tribute-money, the Evangelist relates the following discourse: “What thinkest

thou, Simon, of whom do the kings of the earth take tribute ; of their own children, or of strangers ? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.” I wish to see the force of his argument.

B.—The tribute mentioned here was a yearly offering for the service of the temple, which every Jew, even in foreign countries, was required to pay. It was, therefore, a tribute paid *to God*, as being for the service of his *temple* ; and when our Lord declares that the children of kings were exempt from tribute, he intimates, that he was, by his natural relation to God as his own *Son*, free from the temple-tribute. But to avoid offence, he paid it by miracle, not having so much as even a *stater*, which was the coin found in the fish’s mouth.

A.—What was the amount of the tribute money ?

B.—Half a shekel, equivalent to two Greek drachmæ, or two Roman denarii, or fifteen pence of our money. The *stater* was equal to four drachmæ, and was just sufficient, therefore, to pay both for Jesus and Peter ; who was as poor as his Master.

A.—Was the money created in the fish’s mouth ?

B.—Curious questions we are not to ask. However it came there, this is plain, that nothing but Omniscience could discern it in the depths of the sea, and nothing but the Power which worketh throughout all nature, could bring that fish to Peter’s hook. But have you noticed the interesting parable which speedily follows this relation ?

A.—Do you refer to the debtor, who, having been

generously forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents by his lord, refuses to forgive a fellow-servant who owed him two hundred pence ?

B.—The same ; and I wish you to remember the two lessons which it teaches : That no offences of our fellow-creatures bear any comparison, as to number and magnitude, with our offences against God ; and that therefore we are bound to forgive them freely, as our Lord forgives us.

A.—What was the value of ten thousand talents ?

B.—Near two millions sterling ; and the two hundred pence or denarii, each denarius being about sevenpence-halfpenny of our money, you may easily compute.

A.—What was “the feast of tabernacles,” which our Lord went up to Jerusalem to observe ?

B.—It was instituted to commemorate the dwelling of the Israelites in tabernacles or tents, whilst they wandered in the wilderness. In our Lord’s discourses (John vii.) on that occasion have you noticed that striking and interesting passage ?—“In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come to me and drink. He that believeth in me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.”

A.—Why do you refer to it ?

B.—Because it affords an illustration of the manner of our Lord’s teaching, by turning surrounding objects, or passing events, into occasions of instructing his dis-

ciples in the most important truths. So the feeding of the people in the desert, led him to discourse of himself as the bread of life ; his asking drink of the Samaritan woman, led him to speak of “ living water ; ” and many of his parables were probably grounded upon some occurrences which had actually taken place, the leading circumstances of which were seized upon by him to convey the great and deep truths which he wished thus to fix in the memory, and plant in the hearts, of his followers.

A.—To what occurrence in the feast of tabernacles did our Lord refer in the passage you have quoted ?

B.—To the drawing of water from the spring Siloam, which was done by the people on “ the last day of the feast.” This spring issued from a rock near the temple ; part of the water drawn on this occasion was drunk amidst joyful acclamations ; and the rest was poured over the evening sacrifice, the people singing in the words of Isaiah, “ With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.”

A.—Did they not intend by this to commemorate the issuing of the water from the smitten rock in the wilderness, when the people were perishing for thirst ?

B.—And “ that Rock,” says St. Paul, “ was Christ ; ” that is, a type of Christ. Our Lord therefore applies it to himself, and cries, “ If any man thirst let him come to *me* and drink ; ” and promises to put his Holy Spirit into the hearts of all that believe ; so that they shall have a constant spring of vital, heavenly, sanctifying influence *in* themselves, but *from* Him. For this

great blessing, without which your spirit must ever thirst and be unsatisfied, I entreat you to apply to Him. Come, and he will thus richly and abundantly impart to you his Holy Spirit.

A.—This great promise is, indeed, most encouraging ; and I pray that I may have grace to “ come ” to Him in the true thirst of desire, and with entire confidence in his truth and grace.

B.—I have mentioned our Lord’s custom of making use of familiar objects, occupations, and occurrences, in order to convey instruction, do you see the advantages which were derived from this by his disciples afterwards ?

A.—This does not immediately suggest itself.

B.—Moral teachers among the wiser Heathen generally hid from the vulgar the little truth which they knew, by wrapping it in dark allegories, or in foreign fables, or in obscure philosophic discussion, or in languages or a style known and comprehensible only by the learned ; whilst our Lord not only used easy parables which were less the veil than the graceful dress of truth, and the plainest enunciations of his doctrine ; but he associated his heavenly wisdom with the scenes of nature, and with familiar occurrences, so as to make them standing instructors that might suggest to us the truths of which he made them the emblems, whenever we beheld them.

A.—I comprehend your meaning ; but please to proceed.

B.—His disciples, after he had left them, and his voice

no longer fell upon their ears, surely, could not see the sun, without being reminded that Christ is “the light of the world;” nor see a lamp placed upon its stand, without being warned not to hide their light “under a measure;” nor notice “a sower going forth to sow,” without being warned how they both sowed and received “the word of God;” nor observe weeds among the corn, but feel impressed with the separation of the false disciple from the true at “the end of the world;” nor “consider the lilies of the field,” without remembering the discourse of Christ on a particular providence; nor mark the silent growth of small seeds into great trees, without being encouraged as to the prevalence and success of their Divine religion; nor look upon a “vine and its branches,” without feeling their dependence upon their Lord for life, and growth, and fruitfulness; nor see an eastern shepherd *leading* his flock, without thinking of the “good Shepherd,” who lays down his life for the sheep, leads them forth to pasture, knows them “by name,” makes himself known to them by “his voice,” “gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom,” suffers them “not to perish, but gives to them eternal life.” And though to enter fully into the force and beauty of some of these images, we must recollect the climate and customs of the East, yet they are, for the most part, perfectly intelligible in all places; and many others which are found in his discourses, are quite as forcible in one country as another. “Living water,” or running streams, are every where emblems of the perennial supply of the Spirit; the

“bread that perisheth” reminds us of that “which endureth unto everlasting life;” the breaking of morning, of “the dayspring from on high;” the interruption of labour by darkness, of the “night in which no man can work;” the afflicted poor, of Lazarus; pampered opulence, of him who was “clothed in purple and fine linen,” and from neglect of his salvation “lifted up his eyes in hell;” and alarms of sudden death are felt to be the voice of Him who bade us “watch,” because he might “come in such an hour as we should not think of.” I might multiply the instances; but nothing is more obvious, than that all creation, and even the common events of life, have been made the echoes of his own eternal truth; and rendered vocal for our instruction in spiritual things. All nature may be said to be sanctified to the disciple by the association of its most striking and most familiar objects with the words of Him “who spake as never man spake.”

A.—When our Lord said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” why did the Jews take up stones to stone him?

B.—Clearly, because, by asserting his pre-existence to Abraham, they understood him to assert his Divinity.

A.—And our Lord, by not correcting this notion, confirmed it?

B.—Undoubtedly; as in every other instance in which they understood him to assert the same thing.

A.—Why does St. John call our Lord THE WORD, which title is not used by the other Evangelists?

B.—John lived and wrote later than the other Evan-

gelist, when certain false Christian teachers, who had studied the Greek philosophy, applied to Christ the term **Logos** or *Word*, which was found both in Plato, and Philo, a philosophizing Jew of Alexandria, and among the Gnostics; and used it to express some mystical notion of Christ's pre-existent nature, which, however, implied, that He was *inferior* to the supreme God. Whether St. John was acquainted with the writings of Plato or Philo, may be doubted: But he knew that the term, *the Word*, is an appellative of Messiah in the Old Testament; that it is there used in the sense of his absolute Divinity; and he therefore transfers this Old Testament title into the New, and fixes its sense for ever beyond the reach of all cavil.

A.—How does this appear?

B.—He declares that the Word was in “the beginning;” that is, when time and creatures *began* to be; or, as St. Paul observes, “He is before all things;” and, consequently, not a creature: That He was “*with* God,” which marks distinction, and yet “*God*,” which declares unity; words with which nothing harmonizes, but the orthodox doctrine of a distinction of co-equal Persons in the unity of the Divine essence. The Word is then declared to have created all things; and thus, by creative acts, is his Divinity as fully declared as that of the Father.

A.—When our Lord declares that unless a man “*hate* his father, mother,” &c., he cannot be his disciple, what does he mean?

B.—Simply that he is to *love them less* than his duty

to God, and fidelity to Christ. It is a Hebraism, or a mode of speaking peculiar to the Hebrews.

A.—In the comparisons used by Christ, is it not remarkable that God should, in one parable, be likened to an “*unjust judge*,” and our Lord himself to a “*thief* coming in the night?” I know that this is as it ought to be, but I ask for information.

B.—An ancient rhetorician observes, that “in comparisons it is not necessary that there should be a perfect resemblance in the objects, but only in *those qualities* for the sake of which they are compared.” When a poet likens a hero to a lion, he does not intend to intimate that he is brutal and savage; but the comparison is only between the courage of both. For the same reason our Lord is compared to a thief, merely because his coming will be unexpected by the unwatchful, and a sudden breaking in upon the spiritual slumbers of mankind. The unjust judge and the Almighty are rather to be viewed in *contrast* to each other. Our Lord’s argument is this: If an unprincipled judge can be overcome by the importunity of a poor widow, shall not God, who is essential goodness, redress the wrongs of his own peculiar people?

A.—What was the “*feast of dedication*,” at which our Lord was present at Jerusalem?

B.—This was not a feast of Divine appointment; but was instituted by that pious patriot, Judas Macca-bæus, in commemoration of the cleansing of the second temple and altar, after they had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. 1 Maccabees iv. It commenced

on the fifth of December, lasted eight days, and was also called *the feast of lights*, because the Jews illuminated their houses on the occasion. Thus our Lord did not refuse to sanction a religious service, although not expressly commanded, which originated in a thankful commemoration of a great national deliverance, and which was untainted by any superstition.

A.—Our Lord, on several occasions, showed great regard for young people, and for children.

B.—Which ought to encourage the young to come to him in prayer for his blessing. His taking up children, “little children,” in his arms, and blessing them, and declaring, that “of such is the kingdom of God,” proves these important points: First, that young children are capable of grace; for the imposition of hands was used by the Jews in the invocation of the Holy Spirit: Second, that children may be the members of his Church on earth: Third, that the salvation of children, dying before actual sin, is certain; “for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

A.—When our Lord, in going up for the last time to Jerusalem, speaks “to the twelve” Apostles of his death, why does he say that the Jews should “deliver Him up to the Gentiles?”

B.—“The Gentiles” were the Romans; for the Jews had no longer the power of inflicting capital punishment.

A.—Our Lord appears to have entered in triumph into Jerusalem; but he rode on *an ass*. Was not this unsuitable to the pomp, which, on this occasion, he assumed?

B.—Not at all; for horses had been forbidden to the

judges and kings of Israel lest they should confide in cavalry, which, in those days, was a very formidable arm of war, more than in God. Hence, judges and kings rode on asses, which are finer animals in Palestine than with us, and excited no idea of meanness and contempt.

A.—When our Lord came near the city on this occasion, he wept over it.

B.—This showed his benevolence, for he had been treated with great indignity and ingratitude by its wretched inhabitants, and had seldom entered it but at the hazard of his life. Yet the tears of our Lord produced as little effect upon an obdurate people as his discourses; and his prediction on this occasion, that the days should come, in which “ thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee ; and they shall not leave one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation,” was literally fulfilled.

A.—How does this appear ?

B.—The Roman commander, Titus, afterwards Emperor, to cut off all hope of safety, encompassed the city with a trench and mound ; though this was a most laborious undertaking, for it measured nearly five miles. The very foundations of the temple were afterwards ploughed up, and, literally, “ not one stone was left upon another.”

A.—Why was the man without the wedding-garment excluded from the feast ?

B.—Because it was the custom to bestow robes on guests; and his appearing without one, was both his own fault, and an insult upon the sovereign. This parable indicates both the necessity of preparation for heaven, and that, if we are found without it, the guilt will be our own. This robe of a regenerate nature is prepared for you in the public royal wardrobe of our Lord, who gives to his guests, like the sovereigns of antiquity, “ changes of garments,” to fit them to appear in his immediate presence; but the *application* must be yours, and you will never be refused.

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## CONVERSATION XVIII.

PROPHECIES OF OUR LORD AS TO THE DESTRUCTION  
OF JERUSALEM. — INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S  
SUPPER. — BAPTISM. — OUR LORD'S PASSION. —  
RESURRECTION.

A.—IN the prophecies which our Lord delivers as to the destruction of Jerusalem, what is meant by his words, “ For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together ? ”

B.—The carcase is the Jewish nation, and the eagles the Roman armies, who carried the image of this bird upon their standards.

A.—What is meant by “ the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place ? ”

B.—The same thing as the eagles, or Roman standards ; for these being objects of worship to the Romans, were “an abomination,” that is, idolatrous ; and, wherever the armies, which bore them, came, they truly inflicted “desolation.” Before this time, it was customary for the Roman governors to respect the scruples of the Jews ; and, when they came up to Jerusalem, to leave the eagles of their guard behind at Cæsarea.

A.—You have already said that these prophecies have a double reference, to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world.

B.—They have ; and no event could be more fit to represent the final doom of the wicked than this. The Christians, believing the words of Jesus, fly away in time ; and the terrible destruction of the unbelieving Jews, more severe than had been suffered by any nation, was a suitable representation of “the end of all those who believe not the Gospel.”

A.—The style of Christ seems unusually elevated in these discourses.

B.—It is ; from the calm and tranquil manner in which he usually speaks, and from the allusions he is accustomed to make to the soft and beautiful scenes of nature, and the pleasing events of domestic life, he rises into awful grandeur : “The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven ;” the meaning of which symbols in prophetic language you already know. “Distress of nations and perplexity” come next ; the tumultuous agitation of populous regions are compared to

“ the sea and its waves roaring ; whilst men’s hearts fail them for fear,” when looking forward to a succession of dire events, the issue of which should shake “ all the powers of heaven.” And then, to complete this scene of terror, “ the sign of the Son of Man is seen in the heaven ;” the Messiah they rejected and crucified bursts upon them in vengeful and overwhelming glory, and “ all the tribes of earth wail ” because of Him. He sends forth “ his angels to gather together his elect,” and pours out upon the rest the full-charged vials of his righteous judgment. There is, throughout the whole, as I have said, an ultimate respect to the judgment of the great day ; for this is one of those prophecies which have a twofold application, one near, the other remote. And if you read the deeply-affecting account, given by Josephus, of the last war of the Jews with the Romans, you will see that the fanatical and infatuated resistance of the Jews, and the stern, exterminating ferocity of the exasperated Romans, united to bring down upon this wretched and devoted race a weight of calamities which have no parallel in history, and which could therefore only be fitly represented by symbolical scenery, taken from the final judgment itself. The whole account is too long to present you with even an abstract ; but as to the result, when the city was taken after a long and murderous siege, the Roman soldiers wearied themselves with the work of slaughter ; and when that ceased, all above seventeen years old were sent to Egypt, to work in mines, or were distributed among

the provinces, to fight with wild beasts in the public shows. Twelve thousand died of hunger, and above a million of persons perished in the siege; for the population of the surrounding districts, being assembled at the feast of unleavened bread, were shut in by the sudden commencement of the siege. Ninety-seven thousand persons were taken prisoners, and were so barbarously treated as often to prefer death to life.

A.—Were the buildings preserved?

B.—During the siege the temple was destroyed by fire, although Titus wished much to preserve it. The Roman eagles, the “abomination” just spoken of, were planted upon its smoking ruins; and then, contrary to all apparent human motives, the Romans proceeded to complete the work of destruction after the capture of the city, so implacably, that of the streets, palaces, fortresses, and temple, not a vestige remained except three towers, and a part of the western wall.

A—I have read of the triumphal arch of Titus still standing at Rome; was that erected to commemorate his victories over the Jews?

B.—A most splendid triumph was exhibited at Rome by the emperor Vespasian and his son Titus. Among the spoils which were displayed in the procession, were the golden table, the candlestick of gold with seven branches, and the Book of the Law taken from the temple; that Book which, unknown to the Romans, contained predictions, written many centuries before, of all that had befallen the wretched people, whom, as unconscious instruments of the Divine purposes, they

had subdued and “crushed as the grapes of the wine-press.” The arch of Titus was erected in memory of this triumph, and has bas-reliefs, still visible, of the golden table and candlestick, the censers, the silver trumpets, and a procession of captive Jews. Thus, Almighty God, in the preservation of the Works of Josephus, himself a Jew, and in these monuments, has been pleased to continue the proofs of the exact accomplishment of the predictions of Christ, and of the Prophets who preceded his advent. It is a curious fact that no Jew at Rome has ever been known to go under the arch of Titus to this day; although it stands across one of the public streets, the Jews go considerably round to avoid it. Thus tacitly do they acknowledge the truth of those historical facts, which, by fulfilling the prophecies of our Lord, prove **HIM**, whom they still reject, to be the Christ.

A.—How long after the death of Christ was it before Jerusalem was taken?

B.—About forty years; during which time, the Gospel was preached to them by the Apostles and others, and the offers of mercy from their Saviour were continued. These they contemptuously rejected, and so “filled up the measure of their iniquities.”

A.—What became of the Christians at Jerusalem during this siege, for there was a large and flourishing Hebrew Church in that city?

B.—When the Roman armies approached, as they believed the words of Christ, they escaped, and withdrew to Pella and other places beyond Jordan.

A.—Our Lord was put to death at the feast of the passover; was not this so overruled, that he might fulfil the great type of the paschal lamb?

B.—Doubtless; and immediately after the paschal supper, he took the bread and divided it among his disciples, and commanded them all to drink of the cup; and in this manner, he instituted the Lord's supper," which all his disciples were enjoined to celebrate, "until he come" the second time to judge the world.

A.—What is the import of this ordinance?

B.—We commemorate the *fact* of Christ's sacrificial death; and, by so doing, we *declare* and *exert* our faith in it when we approach the Lord's table with suitable dispositions.

A.—It is called sometimes *the Eucharist*; sometimes, *the Sacrament*; and sometimes, *the Communion*; what is the import of these terms?

B.—It is called *the Eucharist*, from a Greek verb, which signifies to give thanks, because it is a *thankful* remembrance of Christ's death. *Sacrament* signifies a holy ceremony, and was used also by the Romans for the military oath of fidelity. It was applied in the Latin Church to the Lord's supper probably for both these reasons, since this is a most sacred ceremony, in which we pledge ourselves to be the faithful followers of our Saviour. It is also called *the Communion*, because of the common participation of all true believers in the benefits which it sets forth; and because it is at once a pledge of our fellowship with each other, and of our fidelity to Christ. By the Greek

Fathers of the Church, it is called a *mystery*, because it represented spiritual things in emblem or sign.

A.—This is also the case with baptism.

B.—Yes ; there are two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper ; and their nature is well expressed in an ancient Catechism : “They are holy visible signs and seals ordained by God, that he may more fully *declare* and *seal* by them the promise of the Gospel unto us ; to wit, that, not only to all believers in general, but unto each of them in particular, he freely giveth remission of sins and life eternal, upon the account of that only sacrifice of Christ which he accomplished upon the cross.”

A.—Do not the Papists ground their monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation upon the words of our Lord when he gave the bread, saying, “This is my body ?”

B.—Yes ; forgetting that when He took “the cup,” he said, “This is my blood,” although they will not allow that the cup was his blood, but the wine contained in it ; yet if one be taken literally, so ought the other.

A.—Why, truly it would seem as rational to say, that a *door* was Christ, or a *vine* Christ, because he says, “I am the door,” and “I am the true vine.”

B.—That the disciples understood him figuratively, appears from their asking no explanation. And indeed, they were accustomed to this elliptical manner of speaking in the celebration of the paschal supper, which was familiarly called “the passover ;” whereas it only represented or commemorated the *passing over* of

the destroying angel. So also when the Jews take up the plate containing the bread, they say, "This is the bread of poverty and affliction, which our fathers did eat in the land of Egypt," meaning, "This bread *represents* or *commemorates* the bread which our fathers did eat."

A.—What was "the Hymn" which our Saviour and his disciples sang after the supper, and just before they went out to the Mount of Olives?

B.—The concluding portion of the great thanksgiving used by the Jews on that occasion, which consists of the Psalms from the one hundred and thirteenth to the one hundred and eighteenth inclusive.

A.—Is the celebration of the Lord's supper obligatory upon all Christians?

B.—Not as merely professing to be Christians whilst living in the spirit of the world; for in that case they have no right to the Lord's table, but eat and drink "unworthily to their condemnation." But it is at once the duty and privilege of all true penitents and sincere believers. "Do this in remembrance of me," is our Lord's command, which cannot be violated with impunity. The ordinance itself is both *a sign* and *a seal* of the grace of the new covenant, which is offered to us, and confirmed to us, in every celebration; and when we communicate in faith, we become anew parties to this covenant, and its grace stands afresh confirmed to us.

A.—I suppose, that, after the Jewish Council, with the High Priest at its head, had found Jesus guilty of

the capital offence of blasphemy, as they pretended, because he said that he was the Son of God, he was taken to Pilate, because without the Roman Governor they had no power to put any one to death ?

B.—Just so ; and Pilate manifestly endeavoured to save him, but was overruled by their clamour, and the fear of being represented to Cæsar as negligent in his office.

A.—Why did Pilate send him to Herod ?

B.—Herod was at this time at Jerusalem keeping the passover ; and Pilate, judging from common report that Christ was a Galilean, concluded that he was under Herod's jurisdiction. This prolonged the insults heaped upon our Saviour ; but though “ Herod and his men of war set him at nought,” yet Herod found in him nothing “ worthy of death,” and thus joined his testimony to that of Pilate, as to our Lord's perfect innocence of any crime against society.

A.—Crucifixion was not a Jewish punishment, I believe ?

B.—And among the Romans it was only inflicted upon slaves, and those on whom it was intended to fix the greatest possible ignominy ; never upon a Roman citizen. Thus our Lord stooped at once to the most lingering and painful, and to the most shameful, death ; and thus the cross of Christ became a stumbling-block. “ The Pagans,” says Justin Martyr, “ think that we are insane in giving Divine honours to one who was crucified.” “ The person you call Messiah,” says Trypho, an early Jewish writer against Christianity,

“ incurred the lowest infamy, for he fell under the greatest curse of the law,—he was crucified; for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.’” How little did these objectors understand, that thus “He was made a *curse* for us !”

A.—They crucified our Lord at “the *third* hour;” what time was that?

B.—Nine in the morning; the sixth hour therefore is twelve o’clock, and from that to the ninth hour, or three in the afternoon, there was a preternatural darkness. And now review the circumstances of that event which gives life to the world. How many subjects of meditation may it afford you! The voluntary devotion of our Lord in giving his life for the life of the world; the meek dignity with which he appeared before his unjust judges; the resigned spirit in which he sustained shame and mocking; the depth of his sufferings, both of mind and body, in the garden and on the cross; the exercise of pardoning mercy to the penitent thief; his care for his mother, who stood weeping before the cross; the dignified dismissal of his own spirit after the last drop of agony had been drained from his cup of suffering; the miracles which attested his high claims in the moment of his deepest humiliation;—the darkness; the earthquake; the rending of the veil, showing the opening of a new way to God; the resurrection of the bodies of several saints, his death thus giving spiritual life to the believing malefactor, and bodily life to saints who had slept in the grave. The multitude were rightly affected by these prodigies, they

left the scene “ smiting upon their breasts.” The Chief Priests probably retired obdurate, and with gratified malignity ; but their triumph was of short duration, for, the day but one following, their guilty peace and security was broken by the tidings of his resurrection from the dead.

A.—All these are indeed subjects of endless wonder. Never was there such a sufferer or such sufferings ! such humiliations and such triumphs !

B.—But let not the circumstances of Christ’s death so occupy your attention, as to lead you from the great *truths* which it eternally teaches ;—the infinite evil of sin, and the infinite love of God. By that blood only can your sins be washed away ; and by that faith only which follows a true repentance, can you become interested in its merit. But the fountain is open for you and for all. “ Arise, then, wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.”

A.—Our Lord rose again on the third day ; and, on any other occasion, one might be amused at the tale invented by the Jews, that his disciples stole him away whilst the Roman guard slept.

B.—When men are resolved upon disbelief, they can yield themselves up to any delusions ; for the body of the Jewish people seem to have given up their judgment to this clumsy invention of their Priests, although the sepulchre was *sealed* by them, and, on their application, a guard of Roman soldiers was placed over it to whom it would have been death to sleep on their watch.

A.—But the disciples saw their Lord, and conversed with him, and handled his body, and heard his discourses, and saw him ascend to heaven. They had therefore sufficient evidence of the fact ; and as for the world, to whom Christ did not appear after his resurrection, the gift of tongues, bestowed by an effusion of the Holy Spirit, was the public proof, that “ the Christ ” had ascended to his glory.

B.—Your views are just ; and this shows the folly of infidels in carping at some trifling variations in the narrative of the resurrection by the four Evangelists. The great facts are, that the dead body of Christ was never forthcoming after the time assigned to his resurrection ; that the disciples professed to have seen him alive, and to have conversed with him at different times for forty days ; that they never swerved from this testimony ; that they endured every kind of persecution for their testimony to a fact, which was of such a nature that they could not be deceived in it ; and that their excellence of character was a sufficient guarantee that they could not intentionally deceive. Besides, all worldly motives lay on the other side ; and nothing but a thorough conviction could uphold them in bearing tortures and death for “ the testimony of Jesus.” But the miraculous power which they exerted, and to which only can be attributed the mighty success of their preaching as it was the means of producing the conviction that their religion was of God, was the proof both of the resurrection of Christ and of his Divine mission ; for they wrought these works in his *name* and by his *power*. Still stronger

evidence, if we can conceive it possible, would not have convinced the obstinately worldly, because they were predisposed to reject a persecuted and self-denying religion ; but a weaker evidence could have convinced none. The most honest and sincere would, in proportion to their honesty and sincerity, require powerful proofs to induce them to venture their eternal interests upon a new religion, and to renounce that of their forefathers.

A.—The great argument for the truth of the resurrection is, I perceive, therefore, very independent of the minor circumstances in the narrative of the Evangelists.

B.—And yet you will perceive that the whole account is given in so artless and natural a manner, as to carry conviction, by its internal evidence, of the perfect truth of the relation. How natural, for instance, was it that the pious and respectable women who followed him with so much affection, and whose courage led them to stand at his cross when the other disciples forsook him, should bring spices to apply to the body, according to the Jewish method of honouring the dead ! How were the Roman sentinels to be driven away but by fears, excited by supernatural occurrences ?—and such were the earthquake and the appearance of the angels. The statement, that when the angel announced to the women that Christ had risen, and showed them the place where he lay, they departed with “fear and great joy,” is itself almost a full warrant for the whole account ; so true to nature and to the circumstances of the case, is the mingled emotion ascribed to them !

That John should outrun Peter, is well accounted for by the supposition, that, though the tide of Peter's affection to his Master had returned, the remembrance of his fall, not yet formally forgiven by his Lord, might check his speed ; a feeling of shame and fear to be the first to meet him, very naturally intervening. The apparent difficulty that Mary Magdalene should, after the first annunciation of Christ's resurrection by the angel, return to the sepulchre and weep, as not knowing what was become of the body, could never have been put into a feigned narrative ; but may be accounted for from that confusion of thought which strong feeling produces, and the effect of a lingering disbelief in the fact, notwithstanding the angelic attestation of it. Her recognition of our Lord, when he pronounced her name, " Mary," with his usual tenderness of accent, and her instant reply, " Rabboni," *Master*, with her attempt to touch him, are all inimitable touches in the picture, which nothing but the pencil of truth could produce. That two of the disciples should, after his death, return to Emmaus, the residence which they had left to follow Jesus in the belief that he was the Messiah ; feeling according to their lingering Jewish notions that their *hope* had been disappointed by his crucifixion ; and yet that they should be *perplexed*, as not knowing how to reconcile the evidences which he had given of his Messiahship with an event which seemed to refute them all, is so truly in character, that we at once feel its force, and enter into their feelings. The "doubts" of all the Apostles, ignorant as they

still were of the true scriptural doctrine of Messiah's death and resurrection, notwithstanding it had been several times declared to them, are also very natural. They appear to have thought that the appearance was that of his "spirit," not his body, until he obliged them to touch him and convince themselves; and when it is added, that at first "they believed not for joy, and wondered," if these contending and contrary feelings had not existed, they never could have been portrayed in language so peculiar.

A.—I have often felt the force of the appeal made by this affecting narrative.

B.—It is neither coldly and laboriously inventive, nor inflated; the character, and, as painters say, "the keeping," are perfect.

A.—Why did our Lord ask Peter three times whether he loved him?

B.—To give him an opportunity of declaring that love as many times as he had denied him; and thrice to re-instate him in his pastoral office, in order to secure for him the confidence of his brethren. Nothing could be more generous in manner, or Divine in authority.

A.—What does St. John mean when he says, that if all the miracles which Jesus did, were recorded, "the world itself could not contain the books that should be written?"

B.—It is a strong Hebrew hyperbole; importing that the works would be swelled to an inconvenient and troublesome number and size; for it is plain that an

immense number of miracles were wrought by Christ, which are but mentioned in the mass by the Evangelists.

A.—When our Lord enjoins his disciples to go into all nations and preach “repentance and remission of sins in his name,” he gives, I presume, an epitome of the whole Gospel.

B.—Truly so; for the Gospel is intended to produce repentance, by discovering man’s sinfulness and danger; and remission of sins is obtained by faith in Christ, and is accompanied by regeneration, adoption into the family of God, heirship to the heavenly inheritance, and “the earnest” of that inheritance in the comforts which the Holy Ghost sheds upon the heart of every true believer.

A.—Our Lord enjoins baptism upon believing.

B.—Yes; as an outward confession of faith, and means of introduction into his Church; because he must be confessed before men.

A.—Does this exclude children?

B.—Not if children of believing parents; for as the Jews were allowed to place their children in God’s Church and covenant by circumcision, so also are Christians allowed to do the same by baptism. For that children are capable of being placed in a Church relation to Christ, is clear from his own words: “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.” This ordinance binds parents to bring up their children in the knowledge of Christ; secures for them the grace of the new covenant; and lays all baptized children under an

obligation to acknowledge and accept this covenant by their voluntary act in future years, and “ to give themselves up to the Lord.”

A.—Is baptism most scripturally performed by immersion or by affusion?

B.—The mode is a very indifferent thing, because the essence of the rite consists in the application of water in “ the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ;” and because we have no express direction on the subject in the New Testament. But it is clear from the numbers baptized by John the Baptist, and at the day of Pentecost, and from other circumstances, that immersion could not be practised. The primitive mode appears to have been pouring water upon the head of the baptized. Immersion was, no doubt, a subsequent, although an early, invention in the Church, brought in under pretence of making the ordinance more strikingly symbolical.

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### CONVERSATION XIX.

#### SKETCH OF A DIGEST OF THE NARRATIVE OF THE FOUR EVANGELISTS IN THE ORDER OF TIME.

A.—My questions have been exceedingly miscellaneous; but the answers you have been pleased to give will, I hope, enable me the better to understand those important Histories of our Lord’s life, which are contained in the four Evangelists. It however strikes me

that if I could see the principal events of that all-important story arranged *in the order of time*, I should derive much satisfaction from it.

B.—This has been done by many learned commentators, who have published what they term, “Harmonies of the Evangelists,” in which the four accounts are digested into one consecutive history, and the discourses of Christ arranged, as nearly as can be ascertained, in the order of their delivery. All that I can do to assist you, until you consult a work of this kind for yourself, will be to present you with a mere outline of such an arrangement.

A.—That I am anxious to be favoured with ; and shall follow you with attention.

B.—Our Lord was baptized by John in the thirtieth year of his age. The events of his former life, which, for the most part, he chose to spend in obscurity, were few, but striking. At his circumcision, when eight days old, he received the name JESUS, according to the command of the angel, and for this joyful reason, “because he should save his people from their sins.” He was then taken to Jerusalem to be presented in the temple to the Lord, as a first-born son, according to the law ; and his parents offered the sacrifice appointed for *poor* persons, “a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons ;”—the rich offered a lamb. This was accompanied by the remarkable circumstance, that Simeon, an aged and devout man, who had the spirit of prophecy, and to whom it had been revealed “that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s

Christ," was led by the Spirit into the temple, whilst the child was "presented to the Lord;" and he took him up in his arms, and "blessed God," declaring, by the Holy Spirit, that he was the long-expected Christ.

A.—What a moment for Simeon!

B.—And his words declare his emotion: "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He was content to depart to his God, since he had beheld what Patriarchs and Prophets had been for ages expecting, "but died without the sight." The aged Anna, also, a Prophetess, "gave thanks unto God;" that is, poured out praises in sacred verse, under immediate inspiration, on this occasion; and then spoke of him, announcing the joyful tidings to "all that looked for redemption at Jerusalem."

A.—Who were they?

B.—Pious Jews, still found in a corrupt Church, who were then eagerly expecting the fulfilment of God's promises to his people. From the temple he was taken back to Bethlehem, where he was soon after visited by the *Magi*.

A.—Were these Persians; for among them wise men were called by that title?

B.—The Magi were not confined to Persia, but had spread into different countries of the East. They collected together in colleges, and studied natural, as well as moral, philosophy. Many of them had much juster notions of God than any of the ancient Heathens; abhorring idols, and worshipping one God only. These were

probably among the more devout and enlightened of this sect ; and as a general expectation was then spread through the world, that a great Deliverer was to appear, they would more eagerly than others desire that event. God was pleased to intimate to them our Lord's advent, by a meteor, which they were divinely taught to regard as "*his star*," his celestial emblem ; and by it they were directed to the place where this personage, so gloriously symbolized by an extraordinary luminary, lay as an infant of days, in a very humble habitation. Yet so strong was their conviction of the reality of the Divine intimations they had received, that they "*worshipped him* ;" and presented their "*gifts*," the value of which proved a providential supply to the holy family, to sustain them in Egypt, when obliged to fly from the jealous rage of Herod.

A.—Then the first express act of *worship*, paid to Christ, was by Gentiles.

B.—So it appears. But to proceed : On the return of the holy family, by Divine direction they fixed their abode at Nazareth, in Galilee ; and we have no further account of our Saviour, until he attained the age of twelve years, except that "*he grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom* ; and the grace of God was upon him ;"—short, but very emphatic, notices. At the age of twelve years, his parents took him to Jerusalem, to the feast of the passover ; where, having lingered behind them in the temple, he was found sitting in the midst of the doctors, "*hearing them, and asking them questions* ;" while "*all that heard him were astonished*

at his understanding and answers.” This astonishing wisdom, however, you will observe, wore in him the robe of humility, so appropriate and beautiful in youth. He *heard*, and he *asked questions*. Nor was his *wisdom* exhibited in formal discourses, unsuited to his years; but in his “*answers*.” The humility of Christ is a highly instructive pattern, therefore, to the young; and forcibly reprobates juvenile obtrusiveness. The piety, as well as the humility, of his conduct, is also conspicuous. At twelve years of age, he was “about his Father’s business.” His filial obedience is also marked in these brief notices of our Saviour’s early life; for it is said, “He went down with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, and was *subject* unto them.”

A.—A veil of entire obscurity is, I think, drawn over our Saviour’s life, until his baptism by John.

B.—This took place in his thirtieth year: So that, for eighteen years of his life, we hear nothing of him.

A.—Is not this remarkable?

B.—It is; but there is, doubtless, as much *wisdom* in what God hides from us, as in what he reveals. A period of about *six months* elapsed from the baptism of Christ until he attended the first passover at Jerusalem, in the full and open exercise of his office as a “Teacher sent from God.” This short period had its remarkable events. He received the testimony of “the Father” and “the Spirit,” at his baptism. He was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil forty days; thus passing through fiery trials, and conquering temptations directed against his personal piety, before he

became a teacher of others. He was pointed out by John as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” He called Andrew and Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael, to be his disciples, who followed him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God;” and he changed the water into wine, at the marriage-feast at Cana in Galilee. These six months, with the exception of his momentary transportation to the pinnacle of the temple by the permitted agency of Satan, were spent chiefly on the banks of the Jordan.

A.—Do you date the period of the next twelve months of our Lord’s public ministry, from his going up to Jerusalem to the passover next ensuing?

B.—Just so; and his first acts there were, to expel the traders from the temple, as before noticed; to predict his death, (so constantly was this event before our Lord throughout life!) and to work several miracles; so that “*many believed on him.*” It was at this time that Nicodemus came to him by night, to inquire of his doctrine more particularly; and was favoured with that important discourse on the necessity of regeneration, the doctrine of salvation by faith in him, and God’s love to the world in the gift of his Son, which is recorded John iii. 1—21. From Jerusalem Jesus and his disciples went into several parts of Judea, and baptized many that professed faith in him. John the Baptist having been imprisoned by Herod, our Lord went into Galilee; and as the road lay through the country of Samaria, he came to the city of Sychar, and there held the conversation with the Samaritan woman, at

Jacob's well, which issued in the conversion of many of the Samaritans;—an early proof that the Gospel was designed for the common benefit of all people. Proceeding to Galilee, he there exercised his ministry; and at Nazareth preserved his life only by a miracle. He had discoursed with the people of that city in the synagogue, and they “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth;” and yet, offended at a pointed reproof in the *application* of his discourse, they attempted to cast him down from a precipice: But “he passed through them,” and went away; and “dwelt,” that is, fixed his residence, at Capernaum. In a voyage on the sea of Galilee, in the vessel of Simon, such was the effect of the miraculous draught of fishes upon Simon Peter and Andrew, and their partners in the occupation of fishing, James and John, that they left their employment, and wholly followed him. During this year of his public ministry, Jesus “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease among the people: And his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto him all sick people, that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those that were possessed with devils, and those that were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.” The impression made by our Lord's works and discourses was, at this period, exceedingly great and extensive; for the Evangelist adds: “And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea,

and from beyond Jordan." The calling of Matthew terminated the labours of this year; after which he went up to Jerusalem, to the feast of the passover.

A.—What were the events of the second year of our Lord's public ministry?

B.—Whilst at Jerusalem He healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, for which the Jews sought to slay Him, because he had wrought the cure on the Sabbath; and when He defended himself by saying, "My Father worketh hitherto," meaning even on the Sabbath, in sustaining his creatures by the constant operation of his providence, "and I work," "they sought the more to kill Him," as well understanding, that, by this argument, he claimed God in a peculiar sense to be "his Father," and made himself "equal with God." Our Lord defends his claim in a discourse of considerable length and deep interest, recorded in John v. On the way from Jerusalem to Galilee, his disciples plucked ears of corn in passing through the fields on the Sabbath, being, as it appears, pressed by hunger; for our Lord vindicates them on the ground of necessity. He, on that occasion, declared himself "Lord of the Sabbath," and, therefore, the infallible judge of what was a violation of *his own* law; to which law, indeed, his disciples were bound, but not to the superstitious interpretations of the Pharisees. In Galilee, also, he entered into a synagogue, and healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, to the great offence of the Pharisees, who took counsel with the Herodians to destroy him; and our Lord therefore

withdrew to the coast of the sea of Galilee, which you recollect is the same as the lake of Tiberias. Here great numbers followed him “from Galilee and from Judea,” and from the still more distant regions of “Idumea, and the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude,” hearing of “the great things that he did.” On this occasion an interesting circumstance is mentioned. All diseased persons, it would seem, who only “touched him,” were instantly healed; which occasioned so great a press of the multitude upon him, that he was obliged to be provided with a boat, to stand off a little from land, and from this he spoke to the people. At this time, also, the unclean spirits “fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.” Whilst he remained in Galilee he went into a mountain, and continued all night in prayer, preparatory to the important and solemn act of choosing his twelve Apostles. Being come down with them from the mountain, great multitudes again awaited him, “from Judea, and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon;” some of whom came “to hear him,” others “to be healed of diseases.” The latter were in great numbers, for the Evangelist adds this very striking remark: “And the whole multitude sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him, and he healed them all.” It was about this time also, from some mountain in Galilee, that celebrated discourse, called “the Sermon on the Mount,” to which I have directed your attention already, was delivered. This Divine Sermon was so highly valued by the primitive

Christians, that they made their children commit it to memory.

A.—Having finished this discourse, it appears that he returned to Capernaum.

B.—And there healed the servant of the centurion, who would not suffer him, from a sense of his own unworthiness, to come under his roof; but had so great a faith, that he was persuaded that if Jesus spoke the word only, his servant would be healed.

A.—What did he mean by the reason he gives for not allowing our Lord to come under his roof?—"For I am a man set under authority;" that is, I suppose, holding his office by the authority of Cæsar, "having soldiers under me; and I say to one, Go, and he goeth," &c.

B.—By this he expressed his full belief that Jesus was commissioned by God, and could command diseases to go and come, with as absolute a power as he himself had over his soldiers, who were bound to yield him an implicit obedience; so that he argued, that it was not necessary for him to come into the house, but only to command the disorder to depart.

A.—This was a beautiful thought, and strongly indicative of a lofty faith.

B.—And it was highly commended by our Lord. The next great miracle which is separately noticed, is the raising of the son of the widow of *Nain*, a town also in Galilee, which is related in a very touching manner, and was strongly illustrative, not only of the almighty power, but of the Divine tenderness, of

our blessed Saviour. Luke vii. 11—17. The answer to John's disciples sent by their master to Christ ; the reproof of Bethsaida and Chorazin for their unbelief ; and his entertainment at the house of Simon the Pharisee, when the woman, “ which was a sinner,” anointed his feet, an incident we before noticed, appear to have followed next in order. After which, Jesus took a second circuit through Galilee, “ preaching” and “ healing.” In this circuit he was followed not only by the twelve, but by Mary Magdalene ; Joanna the wife of Chusa, Herod's Steward ; Susanna, and many others “ who ministered unto Him of their substance.” On his return to Capernaum he cast out a devil which had inflicted both blindness and dumbness upon the unhappy man who was the subject of this peculiarly afflictive, and as it would appear, notorious, case of possession ; for it was the impression made by this miracle in favour of his Messiahship upon the minds of the people, which led the Pharisees to utter the blasphemy, “ This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” This was the wretched argument by which they steeled their perverted consciences against all conviction ; and which constituted that sin against the “ Holy Spirit,” whose power co-operated with our Lord in working his miracles, which was declared to be beyond forgiveness.

A.—Then is this the only unpardonable sin ?

B.—It is ; and mark, it is not *every* sin even against the Holy Ghost which is unpardonable, although some make awful approaches to that which is so ; but the

sin which is in truth the only one excepted from the exercise of the Divine mercy, is defined to be that “*blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*” with which the Pharisees are here charged. Our Lord continued at Capernaum delivering several discourses; in one of which he reproves the Scribes and Pharisees for seeking “*a sign* ;” and in another, Luke xi. 37, &c., he denounces upon them various “*woes*,” and unveils their hypocrisy. In another he warns an “*innumerable multitude of people*” against “*the leaven*” of the Pharisees, and calls them to a courageous profession of his name. Luke xii. At this time also he delivered several parables. We next find him sitting in a vessel, and teaching “*a great multitude*,” who stood on the shore of the sea of Galilee. Here he delivered his parables of the sower; of the wheat and tares; of the grain of mustard-seed; and the leaven hid in three measures of meal. In crossing the lake, he rebuked a tempest which had suddenly risen, so that his disciples “*feared exceedingly*, and said one to another, *What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*”

A.—To what part did he cross?

B.—To the country of the Gadarenes, on the eastern side, on the borders of Decapolis, where he dispossessed a demoniac afflicted with “*a legion*” of evil spirits, who were suffered to destroy the swine which the Gadarenes unlawfully kept. Returning back to Capernaum, “*Levi*,” which was another name of Matthew, entertained him, with a great company “*of pub-*

licans and sinners," to the offence of the Pharisees, to whom he declares, that he came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." From this entertainment he went out and brought to life the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue ; and on the way, a woman afflicted with "an issue of blood twelve years" touched his garment and was healed. He heals two blind men, and casts out a dumb spirit, and the Pharisees again blaspheme. After this our Lord visited Nazareth again, and was again rejected.

A.—What influenced them to this ?

B.—They knew the humble circumstances of his early life, and haughtily said, "Is not this the carpenter's son ?" His next act was to send forth his twelve Apostles throughout the country, two and two, "and they preached that men should repent ; and cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them every where." In the mean time Jesus himself went about preaching in the cities of Galilee, which were exceedingly numerous, and continued this service until the twelve returned to him at Capernaum with great joy, "and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught."

A.—Where was the desert place in which our Lord fed the five thousand ?

B.—On the other side of the lake to Capernaum, near Bethsaida, whither he had withdrawn to avoid Herod the tetrarch. After this miracle he retired to a mountain, to avoid the people who wished to proclaim him king ; and his disciples left him alone to cross

the lake to Capernaum. This was in the night; and whilst they were in the midst of the sea, “tossed with the waves, for the wind was contrary,” Jesus comes to them, “walking on the sea,” at first to their great terror, “for they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit.” He then passed over with them into the land of Gennesaret, and healed great multitudes of people, who flocked to him from all quarters. Returning to Capernaum, He delivered those discourses which are recorded in the sixth and seventh chapters of St. John’s Gospel. Thus terminated the labours of the second year of our Lord’s ministry.

A.—Did Jesus keep the third passover at Jerusalem?

B.—No; for it is said, “After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.” Remaining therefore still in Galilee, he held those discourses with the Pharisees and others, which are recorded, Mark vii. 1—17; Matthew xv. 12—16: Mark vii. 18—23; thence visiting the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he healed the daughter of a Syro-Phenician woman, though a Gentile; and passing though Decapolis on his way back to the sea of Galilee, he cures a deaf and dumb man, and feeds four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fishes. This multitude had followed him in his progress through the country of Decapolis. He then embarked on the lake, and sailed down to the coasts of Magdala and Dalmanutha; which places you will see marked in the maps of Palestine. After this we find our Lord at Bethsaida, at the head of the lake,

or sea of Galilee, where he restored a blind man to sight.

A.—Where was Cæsarea Philippi?

B.—At the head of the river Jordan; and is to be distinguished from Cæsarea built by Herod the Great, and the seat of the Roman governors. In “the borders” of Cæsarea Philippi it was, that Peter, in the name of the rest of the Apostles, made his celebrated confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;” and received the promise, “I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

A.—What may this mean?

B.—It is partly explained, by Peter’s being the first to open the Gospel dispensation in its perfected form, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles; for he preached the first sermon to the Jews at the day of Pentecost; and the first to the Gentiles when sent to Cornelius. More largely, it signifies power and government in the Church, in which sense the same promise was made to all the Apostles collectively on another occasion, so that they had equal dignity and authority in all respects; and the Popish notion of the supremacy of Peter is destroyed. At this time, also, our Lord most plainly foretold his sufferings, death, and resurrection, which yet, by a strange perversion of their judgment by Jewish prejudices, the disciples could not receive, and perhaps hoped that he spake only in some allegorical or mystical manner of the oppositions which he was still to meet with from the Scribes and Pharisees before that glorious and irresistible manifestation of himself as Messiah, for

which they looked. It was in these parts, also, that the transfiguration of Christ took place, in the presence of Peter, James, and John, “apart” from the rest.

A.—Why were only three of the Apostles chosen to behold this “great sight?”

B.—The reason is neither given nor apparent; only we see no particular distinction conferred upon Peter above James and John,—a circumstance very unfriendly to the Papal notion of his supremacy over the rest. As immediately before the transfiguration our Lord plainly spoke of his sufferings, so he repeated this unpalatable doctrine with additional emphasis immediately after it, on their return to Capernaum: “Let these sayings sink deep into your ears; for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and he shall rise the third day.” But they understood not this saying;” and, as expressive of the mixed and undefinable emotion which it produced in their minds, the Evangelist adds: “They feared to ask him of that saying.” At Capernaum, which was properly *his home*, he wrought the miracle to pay the tribute-money. Here, also, he taught humility to his disciples by the expressive and beautiful action of placing “a child in the midst of them;” and by delivering to them several important discourses and parables. See Mark ix. 33; Matthew xviii. 10—35; Luke ix. 47—62. At Capernaum seventy disciples were instructed and sent forth to precede him in every city and place which he intended to visit in his next tour; and when the year was about half expired, he went up to Jerusa-

lem, to the feast of tabernacles, where by day he taught the assembled people in the temple, and at night went out to the Mount of Olives. At this time the woman taken in adultery was brought before him ; he cured also the man blind from his birth, who so boldly defended his restorer before the Jewish Council, and by his plain common sense and honesty, so greatly embarrassed them. John ix. He also delivered the discourses recorded John viii. 12, &c. ; and x. 1—21. On his way back into Galilee, the seventy disciples returned to him, transported with joy at the mighty miraculous powers which they had been enabled to exert, even over devils ; and Jesus having received the report of their mission, himself “ rejoiced in spirit,” and gave solemn thanks to his Father. Jesus now remained in Galilee, until the feast of dedication, delivering many discourses, and speaking several of his most finished and affecting parables ; as that of the good Samaritan, by which he taught that every man of every nation is our “ neighbour,” and if in trouble must receive our good offices ; the parable of the great supper, in which he intimated the calling of the Gentiles ; those of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the prodigal son, by which he justified himself against the haughty charge of the self-righteous Pharisees : “ This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them ;” the parable of the unjust steward, in which he reproves covetousness, and teaches the right and religious use of money ; and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in which he warns the proud and luxurious Pharisees

of their danger of eternal ruin. On his way up to Jerusalem, in passing through the country of Samaria, which lay between Galilee and Judea, the inhabitants of a Samaritan village would not receive him, at which James and John were so offended, that they wished to call down fire from heaven to consume them.

A.—And I remember the meek and reproving reply of Jesus : “ Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”

B.—A sufficient answer to all the pretences for persecution, and a warning against a heated and revengeful spirit, even where we conceive the honour of our Master affronted. True zeal is the “ pure flame of love.”

A.—And, as a comment upon his own words, I see that our Lord immediately entered another village, and healed ten lepers ; one of whom, and the only grateful one too, was a Samaritan.

B.—Being still on his journey towards Jerusalem, Jesus instructs his disciples by the parable of the unjust judge, and that of the Pharisee and Publican. He then arrives at Bethany, and takes up his abode in the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, a pious family “ which Jesus loved.” From thence he proceeds to Jerusalem to keep the feast of dedication, before explained. Here, walking in Solomon’s porch, he delivered another of those discourses to the Jews, which, by asserting his Divinity, led them, as they had done twice before, to take up stones to stone him. John x. 22—39.

A.—Rightly interpreting his meaning, when he said, “I and my Father are one.”

B.—And also, “The Father is in me, and I in him ;” words which the Jews correctly thought to imply the *essential unity* of the Father and the Son.

A.—Where did our Lord go after this feast ?

B.—To Bethabara, near the Dead Sea, on the banks of the Jordan, where John at first baptized. Here the tidings of the sickness of Lazarus was first communicated to him, the affecting circumstances of whose recall to life are recorded John xi. 1—54, with inimitable pathos, and with a particularity and emphasis which shows how powerfully this great miracle confirmed the faith of his disciples, and confounded his enemies. This led the latter anew to take counsel to put him to death ; to avoid which, because “his hour was not come,” he retired to “a country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim.” From thence he went again into Galilee, and after a short time, returned to Judea, into “the coasts beyond Jordan ;” “and great multitudes followed him, and, as he was *wont*, he taught them again, and he healed them there.”

A.—A short but vivid description of our Lord’s ministry in every place.

B.—And remember that *teaching* and *healing* are still united in his gracious, although invisible, ministry, —the instruction and renewal of the soul.

A.—What particularly occurred whilst our Lord was in these parts ?

B.—He discoursed with the Pharisees “ who came to him, tempting him,” on several points. Here, too, he laid his hands upon young children and blessed them ; put the rich young man to the test of leaving all to follow him ; and delivered the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. But now our Lord turns towards Jerusalem, for the last time, to accomplish the great purpose for which he came into the world,—“ to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself ;” and the interest of the account given by the Evangelists deepens as we trace the events in succession. “ And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them, and they were amazed ” at his boldness in going up to meet certain death, well knowing the rage of the Jewish Council and the settled purpose they had formed to put him to death ; “ and they were afraid ” for their own safety. In passing through Jericho, which lay in the road, our Lord restored blind Bartimeus to sight ; “ and all the people, when they saw it, gave glory to God.” Still further on the journey, Jesus visited Zaccheus, a chief of the publicans, or tax collectors, and brought “ salvation to his house.” When he was come “ nigh to Jerusalem ” he spake the solemn parable of the pounds ; and arrived at Bethany six days before the fourth passover from the commencement of his public ministry, and took up his residence with Lazarus, whom also the Jews sought to put to death, “ because that, by reason of him, many of the Jews believed on Jesus.” The next day he rode in triumph towards Jerusalem, amidst the acclamations of the people ; “ and when he

was come nigh even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God for all the mighty works that they had seen, and cried, Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord ! ”

A.—Ah, how soon did this multitude of disciples leave him alone in the hands of his enemies !

B.—“ When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it ; ” and weeping predicted its entire overthrow. Being come into Jerusalem, “ the whole city was moved ; ” and he, having proceeded to the temple, “ the blind and the lame came unto him in the temple, and he healed them.” On this day certain Greeks, who had come up to the feast, desired to see him, and were introduced by Philip and Andrew. To these strangers, and to his disciples, he addressed these remarkable words : “ The hour is come when the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

A.—What did he mean by this ?

B.—It is an obvious declaration of the absolute necessity of the death of Christ for the salvation of men. As no increase can arise from seed sown in the earth, unless its parts die, that is, dissolve and vegetate ; so no one could have been saved, had not Christ died to atone for sin. Necessary, however, as this was, and joyful as were our Lord’s anticipations of our rescue and salvation, the cup of which he had to drink

was bitter, and nature shrunk from it. He therefore adds : “ Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour ! But for this cause came I to this hour : Father, glorify thy name.” Here was his submission ! And immediately there came an approving voice from heaven, the voice of the Father to whom the appeal was made, so loud that the people who stood by said “ that it thundered ; ” others, “ an angel spake to him ! ” After continuing his discourses with the people throughout the day, at night he went out, “ and lodged at Bethany.” On the following morning, on the way from Bethany to Jerusalem, he cursed the barren fig-tree ;—an emblematical act before explained. On his entering the temple, he a second time “ cast out them that sold and bought there,” and taught the whole day in the temple ; the Chief Priests and Scribes still seeking to destroy him, whilst “ the people were very attentive to hear him.” “ And when even was come, he went out of the city.”

A.—It was on the next morning, I recollect, that, going up to his daily labours in the instruction of the people in Jerusalem, the disciples remarked that the fig-tree had withered away.

B.—And from that our Lord taught them the efficacy of believing prayer. Mark v. 20—26.

A.—What were the transactions of this day, which was the third before the last passover ; that which he celebrated on the night on which he was betrayed ?

B.—Exceedingly important ; and delivered by the Evangelists with great copiousness. He “ preached

the Gospel" to the people in the temple ; answered the question of the Elders, " By what authority doest thou these things ?" and reproved them by several parables ; among which was that of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, and that of the man coming to the feast, not having a wedding-garment. On this day, likewise, the Herodians endeavoured to entrap him, by asking whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar. The Sadducees, also, tried him on the subject of the resurrection, by the case of the woman who had had seven husbands ; and a Lawyer or Scribe, on the question of the greatest commandment. Having silenced all of them by the wisdom of his replies, he finally so confounds the Pharisees, by demanding of them how the Messias, as declared in the Psalms, could be both David's " Son " and David's " Lord," that " they were afraid to ask him any more questions."

A.—How was it they could not answer that question ?

B.—Because they had renounced the ancient doctrine of their own Church, and of the Scriptures, that the Messiah was a Divine Person ; and in no other respect could he be David's Lord. As his enemies stand thus silenced before him, he reproves them, in a long discourse, with wonderful and piercing eloquence ; exposing all their hypocrisies before the people, and charging all their secret vices home upon their consciences. This address you will find in Matthew xxiii. Whilst sitting " over against the treasury " of the temple, he commends the widow who had cast in her two

mites, not quite two-pence of our money, into the temple treasury. He then takes his final leave of the temple.

A.—As he was then leaving it for ever, did not the disciples call his attention to the massive stones of which it was built ?

B.—And from this he predicts that, stupendous as they were for size, and, for that reason, much gloried in by the Jews, “not one stone should be left upon another ;” which prediction, we have already seen, was literally fulfilled. Having placed himself upon the Mount of Olives with his disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, and with the temple full in view, he utters those lofty and terrible predictions of the utter destruction of the Jewish state and city, to which I before called your attention. These were followed by the impressive and admonitory parables of the ten virgins, and of the talents ; and with that sublime description of the last judgment which you read in Matthew xxv.

A.—What were the events of the next day ?

B.—He spent it in retirement at Bethany ; and in the evening supped at the house of Simon the leper, with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. But “Martha served,” and “Mary took a pound of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus ;” for which she appears to have been rebuked by all the disciples, as having been guilty of an act of needless profusion, and especially by Judas ; but, in his case, from a principle of covetousness. She was, however, defended by our Lord. It was an act of love ; and he accepted it.

“ She hath done what she could,” was his approving sentence ; to which he added these mystical words : “ She is come beforehand to anoint my body to the burial ;” alluding to the Jewish custom of anointing the dead with costly perfumes. On this day Satan entered Judas, and he stole out from Bethany to Jerusalem, to make his infamous contract with the Chief Priests to deliver his Master into their hands. On the morning of the next day he sent Peter and John from Bethany to Jerusalem, to prepare a room in which he and his disciples might eat the passover.

A.—Was it not customary for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to provide rooms in which strangers might celebrate the passover ?

B.—It was ; and this was a room of this description. How our Lord spent the day at Bethany, or what passed on the way to Jerusalem, we are not informed ; but “ when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve ;” Judas having returned to the company in the course of the day. With the paschal supper the events of the night before the crucifixion commence ; and they all demand your frequent and deep meditation. To settle a contention among his disciples, who should be greatest, our Lord takes a towel, girds himself, and washes the feet of the disciples ; thus teaching that “ the chief among them was to be as he that doth serve.” Then, being “ troubled in spirit ” at the treachery of Judas, which could not be hidden from Him, “ he testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, one of you shall betray me.” To the inquiry which the

other disciples urged John to make, who reclined next his Lord at the supper, Jesus privately answered, “ He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it ; ” and having given it to Judas Iscariot, the latter, now more fully than before under the influence of Satan, went out to fulfil his purpose. Our Lord’s discourses were thus confined to the eleven,—weak disciples still, but at least sincere, and in heart faithful. He now gives them the “ new commandment,”—“ *that ye love one another, as I have loved you.* ” Peter’s fall is then foretold ; the institution of the Lord’s Supper follows ; and then our Saviour delivered that tender farewell discourse to the disciples, which is recorded in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of St. John’s Gospel. This was closed by the intercessory prayer of our Lord, John xvii., in which he at large offers up the most comprehensive and important petitions for them, and “ for all them who should believe on him through their word.” This prayer was therefore offered for us.

A.—You have already said, that “ the Hymn ” which Jesus sang with his disciples, was probably the Psalms cxiii.—cxviii., with which the Jews usually closed the paschal ceremony.

B.—This being sung, they went to the Mount of Olives, “ into a place called Gethsemane, where was a garden, into which he entered with his disciples,” and, leaving the remainder at some distance, he took with him Peter, James, and John, “ and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” This was the commencement of his agony. The garden was a favourite place of resort

with our Lord, when he retired with his disciples from the city, and was chosen probably for its privacy. Judas, knowing this place of his retirement, led there the officers of the Chief Priests, who came upon him immediately upon his having rejoined the disciples after his agony. This was about midnight. Our Lord was led first to Annas, and by him sent bound to Caiaphas, the High Priest, who questioned him, it would appear, for a considerable time, “of his disciples, and of his doctrine.” John went with his Master into the palace of Caiaphas, but Peter waited in the vestibule, and there his forward and frail spirit sunk under the influence of fear, and he denied his Lord. As soon as it was day, the great Council of the Jews assembled, and finding no evidence of any crime on which to criminate him, they declared him guilty of blasphemy on his own declaration, that he was “the Son of God,” and so pronounced him “worthy of death.” After various insults, they led him to Pilate’s hall of judgment, because the power of inflicting death was now placed in the hands of the Roman Governor. Pilate, after putting many questions to our Lord, declared that he found no fault in him; but supposing him to be a Galilean, sent him to Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, who was then at Jerusalem keeping the pass-over. Before Herod, too, the Chief Priests “vehemently accused him;” but though Herod mocked him, he found no charge against him which could render him “worthy of death.”

A.—It is remarkable that our Lord was totally silent

to the questions of Herod ; although he replied to some of those put to him by Pilate.

B.—The reason of this probably was, that Herod had no civil jurisdiction over him ; but Pilate was the Governor of Judea, in which country Jesus was born. Pilate endeavoured strenuously to release him ; but the clamour of the Jews prevailed, and he was led away to be crucified. When his sentence was passed, Judas, struck with horror at his crime, brought back the pieces of silver, the wages of his iniquity, to the Chief Priests, declaring that he had betrayed “ innocent blood,” and went out and hanged himself. At the “ third hour ” of the day, that is, nine o’clock in the morning, our blessed Lord was affixed to the cross. Until the sixth hour, or twelve o’clock, he was subject to the cruel mockings of the priests and the people, and during that period gave pardon to the penitent thief, and committed his mother to the care of John. From noon till “ the ninth hour,” or three o’clock, a miraculous darkness was over the land, and then our Lord “ dismissed his spirit,” and by an act of his own, as the Lord of life and death, closed his voluntary sufferings. Immediately “ the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom ; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose ;” and the Roman officer who attended the execution, and his guard of soldiers, “ when they saw the earthquake, and that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God ; and

all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things that were done, smote their breasts and returned."

A.—Why were the legs of persons crucified broken before they were taken down from the cross?

B.—To despatch them, and terminate their sufferings; but our Lord was dead already, "so that they brake not his legs;" and the Scripture was fulfilled, and he was thus proved to be the true Paschal Lamb, not a bone of which was to be broken. Num. ix. 12.

A.—Doubtless it was by Divine impulse that the soldier pierced his side?

B.—No doubt; and thus was the new covenant ratified like the old, with water and blood, the emblems of the great twofold blessing included in the covenant grant, *the remission of our sins, and the sanctification of our nature*. In the evening, by permission of Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, with Nicodemus, having wound the body in linen clothes with spices, laid it in a new sepulchre; and "the next day," that is, as we should say, the same evening, after six o'clock, for the Jews reckoned their day from the preceding evening, the Pharisees, by permission of Pilate, sealed the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, and placed over it a watch of Roman soldiers, to prevent the disciples from taking away the body.

A.—We have already conversed on the circumstances of our Lord's resurrection; but I should be gratified to see the transactions of *the forty days*, from the day of the resurrection to our Lord's ascension, also, in their order.

B.—Besides the appearances of Christ on the morning of the resurrection, he showed himself in the evening to the two disciples at Emmaus, and later on the same evening also to the disciples, Thomas being absent. Between the first and the eighth day, he appeared again to the disciples, Thomas being present with them. This was at Jerusalem. Between the eighth and the fortieth day, the following appearances took place: He met the eleven Apostles in the mountain in Galilee, “where he had appointed them.” Again he showed himself “to his disciples” at the sea of Tiberias; ate with them of the fish they had caught, and restored Peter to his Apostleship. On another occasion near the same place, he opened their understanding that they might know the Scriptures which foretold his death, and its great design; and gave them their grand commission, to “go and teach all nations,” with the promise that he would be “with them alway even to the end of the world.” On the fortieth day, he ascended to heaven from “Bethany,” that is, from that portion of the Mount of Olives which was in the district of Bethany. Thus you have a sketch of the leading circumstances in the history of the Evangelists in order.

A.—I thank you for this consecutive view of these events, and the discourses of our Lord, the particulars of which I hope I shall be careful to study, as they are recorded in the New Testament.

B.—How powerful an appeal the simple majesty of the narrative of the life of Christ, as contained in the

Gospel, will make to the heart and conscience of every man who attentively reads it, may appear from the following singular testimony of even the infidel Rousseau, found in his Works : “ In Christ we have an example of a quiet and peaceable spirit, of a becoming modesty and sobriety ; just and honest, upright and sincere ; and, above all, of a most gracious and benevolent temper and behaviour: One who did no wrong, no injury to any man ; in whose mouth was no guile ; who went about doing good, not only by his preaching and ministry, but also in curing all manner of diseases among the people. His life was a beautiful picture of human nature, when in its native simplicity and purity ; and showed at once what excellent creatures men would be, when under the influence and power of that Gospel which he preached to them. I confess that the majesty of the Scriptures, and the holiness of the Gospel, greatly affect me. View the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp ; how little do they appear placed beside this ! Is it possible that a book at once so sublime and simple, can be the work of men ? Is it possible that He whose history it records can be but a mere man ? Does he speak in the tone of an enthusiast or of an ambitious sectary ? What mildness, what purity in his manners ! What persuasive grace in his instructions ! What elevation in his maxims ! What profound wisdom in his discourses ! What presence of mind, what ingenuity, and what justness in his answers ! What empire over his passions ! Where is the man, where is the sage, who knows how to act,

to suffer, and to die, without weakness and without ostentation?"

A.—And this from an infidel!

B.—Yes, under momentary conviction; and if such be the views of Christ expressed by an *enemy*, what ought to be the sentiments of his *friends*!

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## CONVERSATION XX.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.—DAY OF PENTECOST.—STEPHEN.

—GAMALIEL.—CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.—HIS JOURNEYS, LABOURS, AND IMPRISONMENTS.

A.—THE book entitled "The Acts of the Apostles," was, I find, written by St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul; is it to be considered as a history of the Church for the thirty years through which it extends?

B.—By no means; it is very scanty in its information as to the labours of any of the Apostles except those of St. Paul, and gives but a small portion even of his public life. Its main object was not to give historical information; for, although it contains much of that, and of the most interesting kind, this was subservient to other and still more important designs.

A.—What were they?

B.—It records the appointment of Matthias to the Apostleship, in the place of Judas; it relates with great minuteness of circumstance that important fact, the

descent of the Holy Ghost at the day of Pentecost, which so fully demonstrated, as we have said, the resurrection of our Lord ; it narrates the bold preaching of the Apostles at Jerusalem in the very presence of those who had crucified Christ, and the miracles they wrought *in his name* before the people who had rejected him ; so that we see that Christianity began to be published, and was received, in the very city where thousands were living who could have denied the facts upon which it was founded, had they not been unquestionable. It records the death of Stephen, the first martyr, under circumstances highly encouraging to all who had to suffer and die in the same blessed cause ; for Christ is seen standing at the right hand of God to receive the spirit of his faithful confessor ;—the dissemination of the Gospel in all places into which the first Christians were driven by persecution, so that the storm only scattered more widely the vital seed of truth and salvation, a circumstance recorded probably to support the Church under the numerous persecutions to which it was to be subject, and from which the same effect has so often followed ;—the opening of the gate of faith to the Gentiles, by the preaching of Peter to Cornelius on the express command of God, a circumstance necessary to overcome the Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles, and to show that “no difference” was put between them and the Hebrew believers, the same Spirit being visibly given to the believing Gentiles, as to the Apostles at first ;— the conversion of St. Paul for the express purpose of making him in a special manner an Apostle to

the Gentiles ;—the success of his preaching, and that of Barnabas among the Gentiles ;—the important decree of the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, relieving the Gentile converts from the obligation of circumcision and Jewish rites ;—and, finally, a brief history of the journeys and labours of St. Paul until his two years' imprisonment at Rome, an account which forms so admirable and useful an introduction to his Epistles.

A.—What is the meaning of *Pentecost*?

B.—It signifies *fiftieth* in Greek, and was the fiftieth day from the passover. It was “the feast of first fruits ;” the day on which the Jews offered to God the first fruits of their harvest ; and by the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the assembled disciples it was made that glorious day on which the “first fruits of Christianity, in the conversion of three thousand souls,” were presented to the exalted Saviour, and “added to the Lord.”

A.—The gift of tongues appears to have been a most unequivocal miracle.

B.—Yes ; and it was so ordered as to occur at a time when Jews and proselytes from many distant countries were present at the feast, who might be judges of the languages spoken, and witnesses of the fact. “For what could be a greater proof of God speaking in them, and by them, than their being able to do that in an instant which the study of a whole life could hardly, if at all, qualify any man to do?” \*

A.—And as many of the three thousand converts

\* Bishop Patrick.

were doubtless from those distant parts of the world, they would, on their return, carry Christianity into their respective countries.

B.—This shows the wisdom of God in ordering the times and the seasons of his own works.

A.—Why had the first Jewish Christians all things in common?

B.—It was necessary for that time, when their poor would be refused charity by unbelievers, and when they scrupled to partake of the temple sacrifices, which were a great relief to the poor of Jerusalem. It appears to have been a temporary regulation, and confined to Jerusalem, as it is not enjoined upon any other Christian Churches in the Epistles.

A.—Gamaliel, who advised the Jewish Council to “let Peter and John alone” when they were deliberating upon putting them to death, appears to have been a prudent man.

B.—And his counsel is of importance in the argument for the truth of the resurrection of Christ, and the miracles of the Apostles. He does not deny either; but places the matter upon another issue: “If this counsel or work be of men, it will come to nought; but if of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God. And to him they agreed.” Now if the Council knew that the disciples had stolen away Christ’s body, as they had reported; and that the “lame man” had not been healed by the Apostles, Gamaliel must have been laughed at by the whole Council for presuming it to be even possible that “the

work" could be "of God;" and yet "to him they all agreed."

A.—I see the force of this. May I ask, why did Stephen, in his oration, run over so many points of the Jewish history?

B.—To show that he was not ignorant of the Scriptures, as perhaps the Chief Priests supposed; and then to convince them, that they were the same stiff-necked and obdurate people as their fathers had been. We have probably but the heads of this powerful discourse, and it is also an unfinished one, for they "ran upon him" and "cast him out of the city," to stone him. He spake words which "cut them to the heart," but still in the spirit of love; for he died like his Master, praying for his murderers.

A.—I have sometimes paused to contemplate this striking picture;—the bitter Pharisees urging on the execution;—the witnesses, who by law were obliged to cast the first stone, laying down their clothes at the feet of a young man, who was afterwards to suffer stoning for the same hallowed cause;—the leader of "the noble army of martyrs" meekly kneeling down, and calling upon his Saviour;—and that Saviour fully disclosing himself to the eye of the sufferer, in the midst of "the glory of God," and "standing" to "receive his spirit."

B.—It is profitable often to pause and meditate upon the various circumstances introduced into the sacred narrative; the force and instruction of which is lost by haste and slight attention.

A.—The conversion of Saul was quite out of the ordinary course.

B.—It was ; to show us that the Lord confines not himself to any one method of effecting the salvation of men. Here an extraordinary instrument was to be provided ; and the wasting of the Church arrested by the conversion of its most zealous persecutor. This immediately followed ; for, upon Saul's embracing the faith and preaching it, so great was the effect upon his bigoted employers, that it is added, “ Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria.”

A.—St. Paul's conversion seems to afford a strong confirmation of the truth of Christianity.

B.—It is an irresistible demonstration. For, First, it took place but two years after our Lord's death ; so that Saul must have known whether the miracles of our Lord were denied on good evidence, or, being admitted, were attributed to diabolical agency : If the former, no fancied appearance to him on the way to Damascus could have induced him to believe a manifest imposture ; and if the latter, then something occurred to induce him to admit that they were done by the power of God. Secondly, his prejudices, his interests, his character among his countrymen, and the strength of his religious zeal, were all opposed to his reception of Christianity ; his sudden conversion, therefore, can only be accounted for by some remarkable circumstance ; and as from the moment in which the event which he describes took place on his way to Damascus, he

became a Christian, this is sufficiently in proof that it was convincing to himself. Thirdly, this was a case in which he could not be deceived, for it happened in the day, not in the night. A conversation took place between him and our Lord, the sound of which was heard by them that were with him, although they heard not the distinct words ; and, above all, he was struck blind, and was led into the city by his attendants. There could, then, be no deception in the case ; and the truth of the history being established, it confirms the truth of our Lord's ascension into heaven, for St. Paul saw him in glory, and conversed with him.

A.—St. Paul himself declares that he was “ in labours more abundant ” than the other Apostles.

B.—And justly so ; for Providence opened to him a more extensive field ; and his noble zeal prompted him to ceaseless exertions to the close of life.

A.—Why does he call himself a Roman ?

B.—He was a Roman citizen by birth, as having been born at Tarsus, a Roman colony ; or because some of his ancestors had had the freedom of Rome conferred upon them. In Tarsus he was probably educated in general literature ; and at Jerusalem he studied the law, and the traditions of the Elders, under Gamaliel, “ a Doctor of the law,” before-mentioned.

A.—Does not his having learned the trade of a tent-maker seem to contradict the notion, that he had received a liberal education ?

B.—No ; for the most opulent Jews had their child-

ren taught mechanical arts, to prepare them for any reverse of fortune.

A.—If you would favour me with a sketch of the labours of St. Paul, it might prepare me for a more profitable reading of his history, as recorded in the Acts.

B.—After he was baptized at Damascus, he went into Arabia ; and, returning to Damascus, he preached Christ so successfully, that the Jews of that city resolved to put him to death : And, being privately conveyed away, he went up to Jerusalem.

A.—There the disciples, I recollect, were at first much afraid of him ; but, after they had been assured by Barnabas of his real conversion, he was received with joy.

B.—At Jerusalem his preaching produced so much resentment among the Jews, that they plotted his destruction ; the brethren therefore advised him to leave the city. He went from thence into Syria and Cilicia, “preaching the faith which once he destroyed.” Hitherto he had preached only to the Jews ; but when the conversion of Cornelius had visibly opened “the door of faith” to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas left Tarsus, and went to Antioch, the capital of Syria, to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. In that city the first Gentile Church was formed ; and there the disciples first received the name of **CHRISTIANS**.

A.—What had they been before called ?

B.—By their enemies, Nazarenes and Galileans, both names of contumely ; among themselves they were called “disciples” and “brethren.”

A.—Please to proceed.

B.—St. Paul visited Jerusalem again, bearing a charitable contribution from Antioch for “the brethren in Judea,” who were in distress through a famine which had affected the whole land. After his return to Antioch, he and Barnabas were sent by express direction of the Holy Ghost to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles of various countries. This journey occupied about *two years*, in which they visited Cyprus, Perga in Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidia, and Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, three cities of Lycaonia; and then returned to Antioch. Their persecutions and successes on this tour are mentioned in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the Acts. They then remained a considerable time at Antioch, where a dispute was excited by some Jewish Christians visiting Antioch, who insisted upon the circumcision of the Gentile converts. This occasioned Paul and Barnabas another journey to Jerusalem, to consult the Apostles and Elders there; who decided in favour of the liberty of Christians from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and from the ordinance of circumcision, which, as the seal of the Abrahamic covenant, was now displaced by the appropriate seals of the Christian covenant. After their return, Paul proposed to Barnabas to visit the Churches they had planted: But a dispute having arisen respecting their companions, they separated; and Paul, taking Silas, travelled through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the Churches. Thence he went to Derbe and Lystra, and through Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia, and proceeded

to Troas. There, invited by “a man of Macedonia” in a vision, Paul sailed from Troas to Samothracia, thence to Neapolis, a city of Thrace, and proceeded to Philippi, the principal city of that part of Macedonia. The interesting circumstances attending his labours there, you find recorded in Acts xvi. His next progress was through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica, where also he preached with great success, until the unbelieving Jews excited a tumult. He withdrew, therefore, to Berea, where he was heard with candour; the Bereans searching the Scriptures, to know the truth of his doctrine. From Berea he proceeded to Athens, and in that illustrious seat of learning delivered that fine discourse which you read in Acts xvii.; the fruit of which was, the founding of a small Christian Church. Corinth was his next scene of labour, where he preached with remarkable success, and continued eighteen months; supporting himself by making tents, in proof of his disinterestedness in the service of the Gospel. From Corinth he sailed to Syria, and thence went to Ephesus, where his stay was at that time short, as he intended to hasten to Jerusalem, to be present at the feast of Pentecost. From Jerusalem he returned to Antioch, thus terminating his second apostolical journey; during part of which both Luke and Timothy, as well as Silas, were his companions. On his third missionary tour, as we should call it in the present day, he passed through Galatia and Phrygia, confirming the Churches; and thence to Ephesus, where he continued about two years. Here he wrought

many miracles ; and so powerful was the effect of his preaching, that great numbers of the inhabitants of Asia Minor flocked to that city to hear the Gospel, both Jews and Greeks.

A.—Was it not in Ephesus that many who used magical arts, being wrought upon by the Gospel, publicly burned their books ?

B.—Yes, to the amount of fifty thousand pieces of silver, or more than one thousand six hundred pounds of our money : “ So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.”

A.—It was here, too, that Demetrius, the maker of silver shrines, excited a tumult against St. Paul ; what might these shrines be ?

B.—Ephesus was famous for a temple of Diana, so magnificent as to be reckoned one of the wonders of the world ; and these shrines are supposed to have been small silver models of the temple : And as they were valued only for superstitious purposes, the sale for them declined as the light of the Gospel prevailed.

A.—And so their zeal for Diana sprung, it seems, from their concern for their own interests.

B.—We next find the Apostle preaching again in Macedonia, and making collections for the poor saints in Judea. The liberality of the Gentile Churches was on this occasion displayed in a manner very grateful to the feelings of St. Paul. He saw in it the triumphs of a religion of benevolence over the selfishness of man, and the prejudices of nations. From thence he proceeded again to Corinth ; and there also, and in the

rest of Achaia, contributions for the poor Christians of Judea were liberally offered. To avoid a plot laid for his life by the Jews, St. Paul did not go from Corinth into Syria ; but passed through Macedonia, and sailed from Philippi to Troas, and from thence went by land to Assos, and thence sailed to Mitylene and Miletus,—a place fifty miles south of Ephesus. As he was in haste to go up to Jerusalem, the Elders of the Church of Ephesus here met him. To them he gave a most solemn charge ; and as neither expected to meet again on earth, the parting was of the most moving kind, illustrative of the new and strong affections by which Christianity binds the hearts of men together, and of the true “communion of saints.” The Apostle terminated this his third great evangelical tour at Jerusalem, A. D. 58, after about twenty-three years’ most active service in the dissemination of the religion of Christ, and the confirmation of the Churches he had founded : For, however short his stay was in any place, his unwearied spirit would not suffer him to remain unemployed.

A.—The account which he would be able to give of the progress of the Gospel would impart great joy to the Apostles and Church at Jerusalem.

B.—It did ; as you will find in the history : But it prejudiced him the more deeply among the unbelieving Jews, to whom, as a Preacher of salvation to the Gentiles, and an assertor of the non-obligation of the ceremonial law, he was particularly obnoxious. Some Asiatic Jews, therefore, who saw him in the

temple, easily succeeded in raising a tumult against him ; and he was dragged out of the temple, beaten, and would have been instantly put to death, had not Lysias, the principal Roman Officer then at Jerusalem, rescued him out of their hands. Supposing him, however, to have been guilty of some great crime, he committed him to custody ; and eventually, on account of the violence of the Jews, he sent him down to Cæsarea, the residence of Felix, the Roman Governor. Thither the Jews sent down their famous orator Tertullus, to accuse him ; but Felix, although he unjustly kept Paul under restraint, treated him as a prisoner at large, and allowed all his friends to have access to him. On one occasion he sent for St. Paul, to speak concerning the faith of Christ before him and his wife Drusilla, a Jewess : And as the prisoner “ reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come,” this unjust and profligate Governor “ trembled.”

A.—And yet he did not release him !

B.—No ; to show how transient such effects may be, he often sent for him afterwards, not to “ hear of the faith of Christ,” but to induce him “ to give money ” for his release.

A.—And because St. Paul refused, I observe, that he left him still a prisoner, when he resigned the government to Festus.

B.—The Jews made another attempt, with the new Governor Festus, to bring Paul to trial, and to obtain a capital conviction ; but no civil offence could be proved against him. Yet the Apostle, fearing perhaps

that Festus might ultimately be induced by the clamours of the Jews to give way to some unjust proceeding, availed himself of his privilege as a Roman citizen, and appealed to Cæsar, that his case might be tried at Rome by the Emperor himself.

A.—I observe, that, however willing St. Paul was to suffer martyrdom in the way of duty, he neither courted danger, nor neglected to use his civil rights in his own defence.

B.—Which proves that he was not a heated enthusiast, led only by his feelings. He knew his life was *a trust*, to be faithfully guarded, till his Lord himself should show that he was to lay it down for the sake of his truth.

A.—Soon after this, it appears that St. Paul made his defence before King Agrippa; who was he?

B.—The son of Herod Agrippa, whom Claudius had made king of Chalcis, to which Nero added some territory in Judea. He came to Cæsarea to congratulate Festus upon his accession to the government of Judea. Before the assembled Courts the Apostle made his defence; after hearing which, Agrippa declared that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian; and that if he had not appealed to Cæsar, he might have been set at liberty.

A.—How long was St. Paul kept as a prisoner at large at Cæsarea?

B.—Two years; after which he was sent to Rome, as you see in the account given of his long and dangerous voyage in Acts xxvii. Whether he was brought

to trial before Nero at this time, does not appear. St. Luke, in the Acts, only says that Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier to guard him, in his own hired house; where, for two years, "he received all that came in unto him; preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

A.—Was there a Christian Church at Rome previous to St. Paul's arrival?

B.—Yes, for several years; and Christianity flourished there in great purity. St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth a few years before; and when he was near Rome, we read, that the brethren came out to meet him "as far as Appii Forum, and the Three Taverns;" the former fifty, and the latter thirty miles from Rome: So great an interest had been excited in the Church there by his coming. And the meeting appears to have been very grateful, for it is added, "Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." It is not improbable that the favour of dwelling in his own hired house might be obtained by some Christians of rank, for such there were in Rome; and that the hire of the house was furnished by them, as St. Paul does not appear to have had any means of defraying the expense. Other distant Churches also contributed to his necessities, during this imprisonment.

A.—What is the subsequent history of this great Apostle?

B.—This is not given in the New Testament. It is concluded from scattered notices in the writings of the Fathers, that, on his liberation, he returned to Jerusalem, and afterwards travelled in Asia Minor, Crete, Macedonia, and Greece, regulating the affairs of the Churches; that he returned to Rome, underwent a second imprisonment there, and finally suffered martyrdom in the persecution of the Christians by the Emperor Nero, in the year 65. During his first imprisonment at Rome, he wrote the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and that to Philemon. His Epistle to the Hebrews was written after his release.

A.—The account, given in the Acts of the Apostles, of the spread of Christianity in but a few years, is, indeed, very extraordinary, and yet it was at the same time diffusing itself in many other places not noticed there.

B.—And it may be a good conclusion to the brief remarks we have made on this interesting Book, to present you with the excellent observations of a judicious English prelate, on the early and rapid spread of Christianity: “ We find, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in their Epistles, that the number of converts to the Christian religion began to increase considerably, almost immediately after our Saviour’s ascension, and continued increasing to an astonishing degree through every age, till the final establishment of Christianity by Constantine. The first assembly which we meet with of Christ’s disciples, and that a few days after his removal from the world, consisted of a hundred and twenty. About a week after this, three thousand

were added in one day. And the number of Christians publicly baptized, and publicly associating together, was very soon increased to five thousand. In a few years after this, the converts were described as increasing in great numbers, in great multitudes, and even in myriads, tens of thousands ; and multitudes continued to be added daily ; so that, within about thirty years after our Lord's death, the Gospel was spread, not merely throughout almost all parts of the Roman empire, but even to Parthia and India. It appears from the Epistles written to several Churches by the Apostles, that there were large congregations of Christians, both at Rome and in all the principal cities of Greece and Asia. This account is confirmed by contemporary Roman historians ; and Pliny, about eighty years after the ascension, complains that this "superstition," as he calls it, had seized not cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country ; that the Pagan temples were almost deserted, the sacred solemnities suspended, and scarcely any purchaser to be found for the victims. About twenty years after this, Justin Martyr, a Christian writer, declares, that there was no nation of men, whether Greeks or barbarians, not excepting even those savages that wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learned to offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of Jesus who was crucified. And thus the Church of Christ went on increasing more and more, till, under Constantine, the empire became Christian ; at which time, there is every reason

to believe that the Christians were more numerous and more powerful than the Pagans. Now, in what manner can we account for this wonderful and unexampled progress of the Christian religion?

“ If this religion had set out with flattering the corrupt passions of mankind, and held up to them the prospect of power, wealth, rank, or pleasure, as the rewards of their conversion ; if it had soothed their vices, humoured their prejudices, and encouraged their ancient superstitions ; if the persons who taught it had been men of brilliant talents, or commanding eloquence ; if they had first proposed it in times of darkness and ignorance, and among savage and barbarous nations ; if they had been seconded by all the influence and authority of the great potentates of the earth, or propagated their doctrines at the head of a victorious army, one might have seen some reason for their extraordinary success. But it is well known that the very reverse of all this was the real truth of the case. It is well known that the first Preachers of the Gospel declared open war against all the follies, the vices, the interests, the inveterate prejudices and favourite superstitions of the world ; that they were (with few exceptions) men of moderate learning, and no artificial rhetoric or powers of persuasion ; that their doctrines were promulgated in an enlightened age, and to the most polished nations, and had all the wit and learning, and eloquence, and philosophy of the world to contend with ; and that, instead of being aided by the authority and influence of the civil powers, they were

opposed, and harassed, and persecuted by them, even to death, with the most unrelenting cruelty; and all those who embraced their doctrines were exposed to the same hardships and sufferings.

“ Is it then credible, that, under these circumstances, the new religion should have spread, merely by the natural powers of its first propagators, in so short a space, over so large a part of the then known world, without any superior assistance or co-operation? Did any thing of the kind ever happen in the world, before or since? As, therefore, all human means of success were against them, what else but supernatural means were left for them? It is clear almost to demonstration, that they must have been endowed with those miraculous powers, and favoured with that Divine assistance, to which they pretended, and which, of course, proved them to be the messengers of heaven.”

## CONVERSATION XXI.

ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES.—EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.—  
JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.—MORAL STATE OF GEN-  
TILES AND JEWS.—REGENERATION.—CALLING OF  
THE GENTILES.—DIRECT INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY  
SPIRIT.—PERSONAL HOLINESS.—PRACTICAL RELI-  
GION.—FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

A.—I AM very grateful for the observations you have made upon the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, but much study appears to me to be necessary to understand the Epistles.

B.—Yes, to understand them in every part ; although their leading doctrines and design are plain to the most unlearned.

A.—Has not the style of St. Paul been regarded as involved and dark ?

B.—To critics who are not spiritual men, he must be a very difficult writer, or rather it is impossible for such persons to interpret him. But to spiritual men, his reasoning will appear to be most cogent and convincing. He has difficulties, arising from his depth of thought, his abrupt transitions, and the references he makes to the opinions current at that time, and which are sometimes refuted without being fully stated ; but even these generally give way to patient investigation,

and richly reward the attention by showing that he wrote, as St. Peter says, “according to the wisdom given to him.” No Apostle is so full, so clear, so copious on the glory of the person and offices of Christ; on the connexion between the law and the Gospel; on the meaning of ancient types; on the atonement of Christ; on justification by faith; on the high privileges of believers; on the union of the soul by faith with the Divine fulness; on the work of the Spirit in the heart; and on relative duties. As he was the Apostle of us Gentiles, so has he left us, in his wonderful Epistles,—writings charged with the richest influence of inspiration,—the means of becoming fully “wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” In reviewing these Epistles, though much must be left to your future investigation, and as to difficult texts, I must, for want of time, leave you to consult the best expositors; yet I shall not despair, if you continue that attention which you have hitherto paid to my remarks, to enable you very satisfactorily to comprehend the general argument of each Epistle, and the bearing of the principal parts upon the main design.

A.—I will endeavour to follow your observations with the attention due to so important a part of the word of God.

B.—You can rightly conceive of the importance of the Epistles only by bearing in mind, that in them is embodied the substance of those expositions of the Old Testament Scriptures which our Lord “opened to the understandings” of his Apostles after his resurrection,

and those truths which the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance, or taught to them, after they were, according to the promise of their Lord, endued with “power from on high.” The writings of the Apostles are, in truth, to be considered as containing those “many things” which Christ declares he had to say to his disciples, but which they could not then “bear.” Those he taught them by his Holy Spirit, and they teach them to us.

A.—Was THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS written first?

B.—No; but it is placed first because it treats chiefly of the great doctrine of *justification by faith*.

A.—What is the evangelical sense of *justification*?

B.—The pardon or remission of sin, through the atoning merits of the death of Christ.

A.—What is *justifying faith*?

X B.—That entire *trust* of a *penitent* sinner upon the merits of Christ’s atonement, which excludes all dependence upon any thing beside, as the ground or reason of this *forgiveness*.

A.—Then you make a distinction between *belief* in the sense of merely receiving a doctrine as true, and believing as implying *trust*?

B.—Certainly; the one being the work of the *intellect* and *will*, the other the act of a penitent and contrite *heart*: “For with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness.”

A.—What then is the course of the Apostle’s argument?

B.—He shows first, and at large, the awfully immoral

state of the heathen world ; and then that the Jews who had the written law, even with all their boasted privileges, practised the same vices, and were even liable to a greater punishment.

A.—Are his representations on the immoralities of Gentiles and Jews confirmed by history ?

B.—They are proved from their own writers in every point ; and the shameful immoralities connected with every modern heathen system are now matters of undeniable fact, although infidel authors used formerly to speak of whole nations of *virtuous* Heathens, whose character, now it is better known, forms an exact counterpart to that drawn with so dark a pencil in the first chapter of this Epistle.

A.—Is it not essential to the Apostle's argument to show, that “ all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ; ” and, if so, how does the actual existence of great crimes among even great numbers of people, and in different ages, prove more than that the majority have sinned ?

B.—But where is your innocent minority to be found ? Before you attempt to answer this question, recollect what is said in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and how he teaches that evil thoughts and desires are transgressions of that law, as well as outward acts ; and remember, also, that the epitome of that law is, “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself ; ” and further, that this law has never been relaxed, but is in full force as to all men, in all ages. Tried then by this rule,

will you find "a just man upon earth" who has never sinned?

A.—Certainly not.

B.—But we have not yet reached the whole truth. How, think you, is this general corruption of manners to be accounted for, but from a corrupt nature?

A.—I see no other way of accounting for it; for if men by nature had not been prone to evil, no examples could have so generally corrupted them.

B.—Then if the nature of man be prone to evil, and that nature was not corrupted in its source in our first parents according to the scriptural account, we must fix upon some subsequent time, when it suffered this corruption; and if we fix this below the flood, then one or more leading branches only of the Noahic family was infected by it, and the rest escaped. But then if any branches escaped, their descendants would be prone to good and not to evil; and if we find none such in the world, but that human nature in all places exhibits the same evil tendencies, then have we no way of accounting for this fact but by allowing that this evil nature is common to all, as descending from one fallen pair, and that, left without the regenerating grace of God, all must necessarily sin, which is the Apostle's doctrine.

A.—What then does St. Paul conclude from the fact that all have sinned?

B.—That "the whole world" is "guilty before God," and, therefore, liable to that wrath which is "revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

A.—But the Jews, adopting as you have before said the error of the sect of the Pharisees, thought that they could be justified by the works of the law; did they mean obedience to the moral or to the ceremonial law?

B.—To both; as acts of moral obedience to Divine precepts. And the Apostle refutes the possibility of thus obtaining justification, by this plain argument: “Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

A.—In what does the force of this argument lie?

B.—In this: If by the law “is the knowledge of sin,” so that every individual is convicted of sin by it, and must be, since “all have sinned;” and if the law denounces “a curse” against all transgressors, and has no promise of remission; plainly, therefore, it follows, that condemnation only, and not justification, can come from the law.

A.—This I plainly see; but then if it be *just* in the law to condemn, how can it be reconciled to its justice to allow of the pardon of the sinner even by the Gospel?

B.—This brings in the grand doctrine of the atonement of Christ, which reconciles the two. That atonement meets the demand of justice, because it presents, as a satisfaction to it, the death of a Being of infinite dignity in the place and stead of guilty men. Hence the Apostle argues, that the pardon of sin through faith in this atonement is “a manifestation of God’s righteousness” or justice, as truly as it is a manifestation of

his mercy. “Whom God hath set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood, *to declare his righteousness*, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time *his righteousness*; that he might be *just*, and the *justifier* of him which believeth in Jesus.”

A.—Then the *wisdom* of God as well as his love is seen in our redemption,—he pardons sin only through the merits of Christ’s death, and by so doing maintains his righteous character and administration as the Governor of the world, by exacting the penalty of his violated law from his own Son.

B.—Yes; and by leaving still under its curse all who refuse to repent, forsake their sins, and believe in Christ, and that too with an unspeakable aggravation of their guilt and punishment. But further, the Apostle proves, that this doctrine of justification by faith alone, was not a new one, and presses the argument upon the Jews by the example of Abraham, whose justification was by faith; for “Abraham believed God,” in the promises which God made to him respecting the promised Seed, “and it was counted to him for righteousness;” which phrase, as I before stated, is of the same import as justification, or the forgiveness of sin.

A.—This doctrine of free and gratuitous justification has been objected to, as leading to licentiousness of life.

B.—And the Apostle anticipated this, and therefore in the sixth chapter shows, that it is impossible that

they “who are *dead* to sin should live any longer therein ;” and thus he also introduces our Lord’s own doctrine of regeneration or the being born of the Spirit, which, although distinct from justification as an *act*, always accompanies it in point of *time*. By justification we are said to be “in Christ,” that is, we become personal partakers of the benefits of his death, and stand united to him as his people ; but “he that is in Christ is *a new creature*,” and dies to sin.

A.—Every justified man is, therefore, a regenerate man.

B.—Just so ; and in the seventh chapter the Apostle proves, that the law is no more able to regenerate, than it is to justify ; since the utmost it can do is to discover the extent and hopelessness of our slavery to sin, leaving us to cry out, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death !” a deliverance which is effected by Christ : For those that are “in him,” as we read in the next chapter, are not only free from condemnation, but “walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”

A.—But if the Apostle in this chapter speaks not of himself, why does he speak in the first person ?

B.—He may speak of his own experience when under the law, that is, under the bondage and condemnation which it reveals to a man enlightened and convinced by it ; but not of his experience as a believer, for in that character he speaks in the next chapter, and says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law,” or power, “of sin and

death.” In both cases he is, however, rather to be considered as speaking general truths in his own person, a common mode with all writers. The conclusion of his argument, therefore, is, that from the law, we, as guilty creatures, can derive nothing but “the knowledge of sin,” and its consequent penalty; but that a true faith in the atonement of Christ becomes the certain instrument of our gratuitous pardon and exemption from condemnation, in which state of acceptance we receive the regenerating Spirit of God, and are freed from the power of “sin,” as well as of “death.”

A.—Does not St. Paul also represent this blessed change as producing a high degree of felicity?

B.—He does; and grounds this joy upon another important *doctrine*; which is, that although justification is an act of God to which man cannot be privy, yet, whenever it takes place, the Holy Spirit bears “witness” to it, by a direct impression upon our spirits, “that we are the children of God.” It is thus that this great fact is ascertained; and it follows, that, as children, we are **HEIRS** of the heavenly inheritance. This leads the Apostle to console Christians under their sufferings in the present life by those fine and inspiring views of the glorious privileges and eternal hopes which, in the eighth chapter of this Epistle, are set before them with so much depth and vigour of thought, and nobleness of expression. But another great doctrinal feature in this Epistle is the calling of the Gentiles to an equal participation with the Jews of the blessings of Messiah’s kingdom.

A.—To this, I suppose, he was led by the opposition or prejudices of the Jews ?

B.—And therefore this subject is found in most of his Epistles, and in some of them largely dwelt upon. It indeed often influences his modes of expression when the subject is not directly before him ; so full was his enlarged mind of this great, and, to the Gentiles, most important subject.

A.—What is the course of his argument on this point ?

B.—He lays it down in the ninth chapter, that to call particular people to superior religious privileges, is a sovereign right of God, not to be questioned ; for though in matters of *justice* he deals *equally*, yet, in the dispensation of *grace* and favour, there is a *variety* of administration ; which is the same principle as that laid down by our Lord himself in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, “ Cannot I do what I will with mine own ? ” According to this principle, he formerly *chose* or *elected* the seed of Abraham to be his peculiar people, and visible Church ; then, of the seed of Abraham, he chose the descendants of Isaac in preference to those of Ishmael ; and of the seed of Isaac, the family of Jacob in preference to that of Esau. Of those whom he thus *chose* to be his peculiar people, he required obedience in proportion to their superior religious advantages, and visited their transgressions of his covenants with more eminent and marked punishments. Thus He cast off the ten tribes long before the two ; thus the two were carried away into Babylon, but

restored ; and finally, on account of their unbelief, were placed under sentence of entire rejection as the peculiar people of God ; so that the believing Gentiles every where might be called to this distinction, and taken into special covenant with God.

A.—Why did he so largely dwell on these topics in the Epistle to the Romans ?

B.—Because that Church, like most other of the primitive Churches, was composed both of Gentile and Jewish believers, he writes so as to instruct both. He shows the believing Gentiles that they were now chosen to be the Church and peculiar people of God, and that the Jewish superiority had ceased ; and that this was done according to the eternal purpose of God. Hence he speaks of the “ predestination ” of the believing Gentiles to these privileges and their accompanying spiritual advantages : “ For whom he did predestinate them he also called,” by the Gospel, “ and whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified ;”—these spiritual blessings being bestowed upon the Gentiles in consequence of their “ calling,” as fully as upon the Jews who thought them peculiar to themselves, or theirs at least in a superior degree. Having exhibited in this manner the unmerited mercy of God to the Gentiles, he then instructs the Jews, to whom this doctrine of the calling of the Gentiles was always offensive, because it implied their rejection *as a Church* ; that as to the right of God to show mercy in the way of peculiar privilege, the Dispenser of all grace was at as much liberty to call the

Gentiles to be his people, as formerly to call the Jews in preference to the descendants of Esau, whom “he hated,” that is, in the Hebrew mode of speaking, as we have before observed, “loved less” than Jacob. Every believing Jew, indeed, was called to enter the Church composed of believers of all nations, and on the term of equality with the Gentiles ; but their peculiarity as a people was subverted by the introduction of a new dispensation ; and for their unbelief and wickedness, their nation was now to be judged and punished. Persons so eminently rebellious were to be made examples of God’s vengeance like Pharaoh ; and, as when the vessel is marred in the potter’s hand, through the bad temper of the clay, instead of a vessel to honour, he makes it a vessel to dishonour ; or as a vessel is broken, so God would humble and break the unbelieving nation of the Jews. Both these figures were used by Jeremiah, to represent the calamity of the Babylonian conquest and captivity, and are here applied to the rejection of the Jews and their destruction. This whole proceeding is however perfectly judicial, not arbitrary. As the sins of the Jews had led to their being placed in a state of “dishonour,” that is, in a captive state in Babylon, and also as they had then provoked God to break their city and state by his judgments, as a potter’s vessel is broken ; so this two-fold calamity, only to be still more severely inflicted, was in reserve for the Jews of that day ; they were to be made “vessels of dishonour,” by being reduced to a captive and debased state among the nations, and

their city and state, “a vessel of wrath, endured with much longsuffering,” was in a few years to be broken to pieces by the Roman invasion.

A.—Thus, then, I perceive that he establishes the sovereign right of God to show mercy to the Gentiles; and his justice in punishing the Jews.

B.—But in the eleventh chapter, he represents the rejection of his ancient people as having a limit, and predicts the restoration of the Jews to the Church, through faith in Christ.

A.—You said that he often incidentally adverts to this calling and election of the Gentiles according to the foreknowledge or purpose of God, in his other Epistles.

B.—And for the twofold reason, that he might answer the objections of the Jews, who formed a part of most of the primitive Churches, or resided in the places where they were established; and to excite the gratitude of the Gentiles. Thus he commences his Epistle to the Ephesians, by a devout thanksgiving on this subject: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Christ Jesus.” The Gentiles were chosen or elected to be the Church of Christ, and thus were entitled to its fulness of spiritual blessings.

A.—But is there not an election of individuals, as well as bodies of people?

B.—Yes; but the election is of a different kind. Bodies of men are elected to religious privileges, independent of their faith, and whilst yet impenitent and unbelieving; individuals are elected into the true Church and family of God *upon their believing*. St. Paul generally speaks of the former; St. Peter speaks of the latter, when he says, “elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *through* sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.” “Many are called, but few chosen,” says our Lord; that is, few individuals, but only because they do not obey the call.

A.—What other doctrinal point is treated in this Epistle?

B.—The doctrine of the influence of the Holy Spirit; which, though not formally proposed, is found in this and all other of the writings of St. Paul. To his *direct* operations upon the soul of man, its spiritual life; its power to repent and trust in Christ; its assurance of forgiveness and adoption; devotional habits; and the spiritual direction of the affections, are all attributed. These subjects are presented under a variety of views, both admonitory and encouraging, in all his Epistles.

A.—Intimately connected with this, I presume, is the doctrine of practical holiness.

B.—Not merely intimately, but *essentially*. The Apostles ground all holiness upon that regeneration of the soul which is effected by the Holy Spirit; and make all its pure and benevolent and heavenly affections,

“ the fruits of the Spirit.” The entire sanctification of the soul from sin is held forth, both as necessary to qualify us for heaven; and as the result of that “ baptism” of the Spirit, which we receive in answer to prayer, and through faith in Christ. Hence the constant exhortations we see addressed to believers, “ to cleanse themselves,” by the means which God has appointed, from all “ filthiness,” not only “ of the flesh,” but of “ the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.”

A.—But this doctrine of direct Divine influence does not displace the efforts of men?

B.—It is our only true encouragement to effort; for, without that, effort would be hopeless, as the experience of all men in all ages has proved. It is therefore for this reason that St. Paul exhorts us, in another Epistle, to “ work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; because it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

A.—The close of the Epistle abounds in exhortations to various graces and duties.

B.—Yes; and as I cannot stay to point them out either in this or in the other Epistles particularly, I must content myself by observing generally, that the Epistles of St. Paul bear this practical character in an eminent degree; for the most doctrinal of them are remarkable for their hortatory conclusions. Doctrine was taught by the Apostle as necessary to faith in Christ; faith, as necessary to remission of sin and regeneration; and these, as necessary to a holy prac-

tice ; all morality not springing from a regenerate nature, and that spiritual life which faith in Christ and the exercises of devotion pour into the heart, being regarded by him as a vain and unacceptable show of virtue, delusive only to the souls of men. But as the duties and relations of life are numerous, directions as to conduct in each were necessary, and are so admirably delivered in the general principles or the particular precepts of St. Paul, that we may appeal to the greatest enemies of the gospel to say, whether if all those kind and pure affections which they recommend were implanted in the hearts of all men ; and the duties of kings and subjects, masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, the rich and the poor, were all perfectly practised, man would not exhibit a picture of restoration to his original rectitude and moral glory, and almost all misery be banished from the earth ? These are subjects which you must read, understand, and remember for yourself. You will then prove that “ the day-spring from on high has visited you, to guide your feet into the way of peace.”

A.—I have indeed just turned to a part of the twelfth chapter ; and surely no precepts so pure, so benevolent, so opposed to the disturbing and malignant passions, and at once so spiritual and practical, were ever delivered.

B.—Read the passage, for we can never be too often reminded of these things.

A.—“ Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly

affectioned one to another, with brotherly love ; in honour preferring one another. Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord ; rejoicing in hope ; patient in tribulation ; continuing instant in prayer ; distributing to the necessity of saints ; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you ; bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves ; but rather give place unto wrath : For it is written, Vengeance is mine : I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : For, in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil ; but overcome evil with good."

B.—And thus you see how, in this doctrinal Epistle, St. Paul connects faith with all holy affections and holy works. The faith by which we are saved, joins us to Christ ; and " he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him." He has " the mind that was in Christ," and thus his " faith works by love."

A.—Who were those weaker brethren mentioned by St. Paul in the fourteenth chapter, whom he commends to the tender consideration of those who were strong in faith ?

B.—They were the Jewish converts, who, from their reverence for the law of Moses, and their national customs, were still very scrupulous as to particular meats and the observance of certain “days” or Jewish festivals. Many of these were things purely indifferent; and we have here a fine display of the elevated character of St. Paul. When Jewish observances were set up as necessary to salvation, or as binding upon the conscience, he dealt with such teachers with unsparing hand, as enemies of the cross of Christ, that is, of the sufficiency of his atonement. A fundamental principle was then at stake, and he was not influenced by a false liberality, like that of modern times, to treat such an error with indifference. But when these Jewish scruples were the result of prejudices, or a mistaken judgment, or a conscience but partially instructed, no tenderness could be greater than that of St. Paul, willing then “to become all things to all men, that he might gain some,” and careful to apportion “milk,” or the milder views of Christian liberty from these Levitical ordinances, “to babes,” and “strong meat” to the more adult in the true evangelical doctrine. Thus he throws the shield of his authority, in this chapter, over the “weak” believer, and on all he inculcates charity in things indifferent. “He that regardeth a day, regardeth it” according to his views “unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not a day, to the Lord,” as believing that he acts according to his will, “he doth not regard it.” Great indeed would have been the peace of the Churches in all ages, if Christians had put this charita-

ble construction, in matters of inconsequential opinion, upon their respective differences.

A.—The Epistle concludes with numerous salutations.

B.—These were either from St. Paul to the leading Christians at Rome, who were known to him by report, or whom he had met with in other parts; or from his acquaintance at Corinth, from whence the Epistle was written, and his fellow-labourers. They show the love which Christians in that age bore toward each other “in the Lord,” and the handsome courteousness with which the Apostle commends the excellent qualities, and good works of those who had distinguished themselves for zeal, holiness, and hospitality,—an important branch of virtue in an age in which it was so desirable for Christians to entertain each other when from home, lest they should mix with idolaters. A grave and graceful politeness marks St. Paul’s manner; and his heart was manifestly very susceptible of gratitude for any kindness done to him or his friends. Of these qualities, the salutations in this and the other Epistles are interesting proofs, and show that true faithfulness, zeal, and honesty abhor all rude and boorish behaviour.

A.—When was the First Epistle to the Corinthians written?

B.—In the year fifty-six. St. Paul commences it by reproving this Church for its tendency to form itself into parties; one saying, “I am of Paul;” another, “I am of Apollos;” another, and principally perhaps the Jewish converts, “I am of Peter;” and a fourth,

pretending to understand Christian doctrines better than any of their teachers, “ I am of Christ.”

A.—The Apostle, I perceive, has two arguments by which to repress this dangerous disposition. The first is, that the Apostles and Evangelists were all but ministers of a common grace from Him who only could give “increase” to their labours ; and the other, that the Church had a common interest in them, and that their various talents had been dispensed for its edification,—“ All are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas.”

B.—He also defends his simple mode of preaching Christ, against some who appear to have been attracted by the rhetorical and philosophic harangues of teachers who had endeavoured to amalgamate the wisdom of the Greeks with the Christian system.

A.—How does he proceed ?

B.—By pouring contempt upon this boasted wisdom, which he had studied formerly, more deeply probably than these rival teachers. He calls it “ the wisdom of words,” making “ the cross of Christ of none effect.” He appeals to the facts, that “ the world” by this “ wisdom knew not God ;” whilst it had pleased God by “ the preaching” which they considered “ foolishness” to save men, that is, actually to deliver them from ignorance, from the wrath of God, and from sinful habits. He utters a triumphant challenge on this subject : “ Where is the wise ?” the philosopher of the Greeks. “ Where is the scribe ?” the learned expositor of every matter relative to the Jewish law. “ Where is the

disputer of this world?" the man who affects deep disquisitions and argues on subtleties. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world," by bringing its moral powerlessness into contrast with the saving efficiency of the Gospel? Finally, he shows that true wisdom lay in that very simplicity of the Gospel which these affected sophists treated with contempt: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory;"—that this wisdom was a revelation from the Spirit of God, which none of the Greek schools could pretend;—and that he spoke it "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Thus he expresses how little is the amount, and how light the authority, of the utmost wisdom that can be acquired in the schools of human learning, in comparison of that illumination which was imparted to the Apostles by the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, the fountain of truth and knowledge.

A.—As the Corinthian Church was in great danger from such boasting and delusive teachers, did the Apostle use any means beside writing this Epistle to guard against them?

B.—He sent Timothy to Corinth, of whom he speaks in the following honourable and affectionate manner: "I have sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every Church." But to proceed:

He sharply reproves the Corinthians for not having expelled a notorious offender, and commands them to put him away, and thus to maintain a holy discipline. He reproves them for entering into law-suits, instead of adjusting their disputes before their own prudent brethren,—strongly warns them against immoralities,—gives advice on the subject of marriage, and things offered to idols,—and shows that they who give themselves up to preach the Gospel, are to be supported by the Churches. He then justifies his own conduct in the exercise of his ministry, and concludes the tenth chapter with a passage, on which it is necessary to make a remark, because it contains allusions to the public games so celebrated among the Greeks, and from which you will find, that St. Paul, in his writings, frequently borrows expressive images. Please to read the last four verses.

A.—“ Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all; but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. But I keep under my body, and bring it under subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

B.—This whole passage is to be explained by referring to the Grecian games just mentioned. Of these, some were celebrated on the isthmus on which Corinth

was situated, and thence were denominated *Isthmian*. With the greatest propriety, therefore, the Apostle says, “Know ye not,” &c., for every Corinthian was perfectly acquainted with each minute circumstance of these exercises, a solemnity every way so splendid and pompous, that there was no danger that the Apostle’s allusions to it, in this and other parts of his writings, should appear low and degrading to his subject. In running, the racers were bound to observe the course and the rules of the race, and to exert their utmost vigour in it. The Corinthians, therefore, are exhorted “so to run as to obtain ;” that is, so to observe the rules prescribed by Christ the Judge, in their Christian course, and to press forward so vigorously, as to have the prize awarded to them. Again : Those who contended in those games, at wrestling and boxing, “were temperate in all things.” The game here alluded to was the *pancratium*, which united both wrestling and boxing ; and it was indispensably necessary that the candidates should submit to the severe regimen, and the preparatory exercises, regulated and directed by persons appointed daily to superintend them. The body was to be purified by strict temperance, braced by exercise, and hardened by being inured to the changes of the atmosphere. “Now, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.” Here a fine comparison is made between the crowns or garlands given to the conquerors in the Olympian and Isthmian games, and those which are reserved for them who conquer in the Christian conflict. The one, although great honour

was attached to it, was but a fading, withering wreath of wild olives ; the other immortal, ever-blooming, “a crown of glory that fadeth not away :” And the apostle’s argument is, that we ought not to suffer ourselves to be outdone by them whose only reward is human applause, in the rigour of our preparatory discipline, in “keeping the body in subjection,” or in the ardour of our efforts. Many other fine allusions to these public exercises, at which all the rank of the states of Greece assembled, and an immense concourse of people, you will find in the Epistles, the spirit of which would be especially felt by the Greek reader, because of the nationality and celebrity of these exercises.

A.—In the tenth chapter, the Apostle cautions them against things offered to idols ; how am I to understand this ?

B.—The Heathens used publicly to feast upon the sacrifices offered to their idols ; and the Apostle most solemnly warns the Corinthians, by the example of God’s judgments formerly inflicted upon the Israelites for idolatry, to flee from it, and to bear their testimony against it, by abstaining wholly from such feasts. These sacrifices were also sold in the public markets, after having been offered in the idol temple ; and some Christians were scrupulous as to eating these, even at home. This, however, the Apostle does not forbid, provided their weaker brethren were not offended by it ; but if they were present, their scruples were to be delicately respected,—the Christian rule being, to forbear things which in many cases may be “lawful,” if

a brother's edification may be thereby promoted. The Apostle proceeds to give them directions for the decent performance of Divine worship ; and corrects some abuses which had crept into their mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper, which had become with them a convivial feast, in imitation of the feasts in the heathen temples, instead of a solemn religious service.

A.—The Corinthian Church appears, by what follows, to have been richly endowed with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

B.—And to show how prone men are to abuse the greatest blessings, these very gifts appear to have been employed, by some of those who had received them, to foment parties in the Church, to establish claims of superiority above one another, and to feed vanity by an unnecessary exhibition of them, and especially of the gift of tongues. The practical ends for which these powers had been given, and for which only they could be lawfully employed, namely, to promote the unity, growth, and harmony of the Church, compared by the Apostle to the human frame, the members of which are “tempered together,” and all sympathize with each other, are forcibly pointed out ; and his bold allegory, from the body and its members, is very finely wrought out and sustained.

A.—What follows in this Epistle ?

B.—Two of the most eloquent and important passages which St. Paul himself ever penned. The First is his description of charity ; the Second, that celebrated discourse on the resurrection, which forms so sublime

and appropriate a part of our burial service. The first shows the power of grace over the soul of man, destroying its natural selfishness, malignity, hatred, and censoriousness, by implanting that eminent fruit of the Spirit, the "charity" which "suffereth long and is kind," which "envieth not, thinketh no evil," &c.; and which shall endure, the bond of eternal union among the blessed in heaven, when tongues have ceased, and knowledge,—the knowledge of the present state, in which men so often desire to excel, rather than in love,—shall be absorbed in the light of eternity, and vanish, like the misty scenes of twilight before the risen sun. Never was a virtue so beautifully portrayed in language, or enforced by motives so powerfully impressive. Where that is not, every thing, argues the Apostle, even in religion, is nothing. Tongues of men or angels, the gift of prophecy, the knowledge of mysteries, miraculous faith, unbounded almsgiving, and a martyr's constancy, cannot, without this, make me more than a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. The second (chapter xv.) speaks of the triumphs of the same grace over the mortality of the body; teaches us that the believing dead, who sleep in Christ, shall be raised up spiritual, deathless, and bearing the image of the glorified Second Man, "the Lord from heaven," at his second advent. And having established the resurrection against those who denied this great doctrine, and presented many lofty views of the glory and perfection of the resurrection body, he sums up the whole in a lofty strain of triumph, uttered by an

exulting faith, over death and the grave ; strips them of all their terrors, challenges their victory, and lays the glory of this victory of mortal man over death itself at the feet of Him by whose power and grace it is achieved : “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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## CONVERSATION XXII.

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.—GALATIANS.—

EPHESIANS.—MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH.—CHURCH  
DISCIPLINE.—PHILIPPIANS.

A.—In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul appears to defend himself against the attacks of opponents ; who were they ?

B.—Chiefly Hellenistic Judaizing teachers, who had studied the rhetoric and philosophy of the Greeks, which they valued themselves upon ; and especially as they applied both, as they thought, to the service of Christianity. St. Paul despised their vanity ; guards the simplicity of the Gospel against their corruptions ; and as they had endeavoured to undervalue him among the Corinthians, as not being one of the eleven Apostles chosen by our Lord, he asserts his apostolic office as conferred upon him by Christ himself, who had appeared to him not only on the way to Damascus, but in several other “revelations.” There are many very beautiful passages in this Epistle, on which you may most profitably meditate ; especially the grateful man

ner in which St. Paul mentions the supports which he and his fellow-labourers had received under the persecutions and dangers to which they had been exposed, since he before wrote to them;—his tender concern lest the reproofs of his former Epistle should have inflicted upon the Corinthians too deep a sorrow;—the triumphant spirit in which he surveys the successes of the Gospel;—and the very striking and highly wrought third chapter, in which he charges the Jewish teachers with obscuring the glory of the Gospel, by comparing them to Moses, who put a veil upon his face, whilst he and the true Preachers of Christ not only with unveiled face beheld “the glory of the Lord” themselves, but by “using great plainness of speech” reflected it upon the “unveiled” countenance of the body of believers; so that they were changed into the same image. In this striking allegory, he with the finest art institutes a contrast both between the law and the Gospel; and between the Judaizing teacher and the true Minister of “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.” Throughout this Epistle, besides many other subjects of the greatest importance, incidentally noticed, the manner in which St. Paul defends himself against the insinuations of the factious and self-sufficient men before alluded to, is marked by great dignity and spirit.

A.—It must have been very painful to such a man to be obliged to defend himself.

B.—Truly so; but faction has no respect even to the most venerable and holy men. The aged Samuel was thus put upon his defence before the people; and

his solemn and calm challenges as to the purity with which he had fulfilled the office of judge of Israel, bear a strong resemblance to the defences which bad or prejudiced men called forth from St. Paul. He is compelled to speak of his labours, revelations, and motives ; but throughout the whole of this delicate and painful apology, you perceive how careful he is to give the glory of the whole of his attainments, deliverances, and successes, to his Lord.

A.—In again reading through this very beautiful Epistle, which contains a great variety of topics, these general observations will afford me considerable assistance ; but there are some points on which I beg to make some inquiry : What does the Apostle mean, in the fourth chapter, by being “ troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ? ”

B.—And you may add what he says in another place : “ As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” These are apparent contradictions ; and such language would only be rational in the mouth of a Christian.

A.—Why in his ?

B.—Because his inward peace and joy are independent of outward things ; and he can rejoice whilst he sorrows ; be at once calm and careful, “ perplexed ” and recollected.

A.—You appear to make the matter still more paradoxical.

B.—But the whole difficulty will be solved if you

read the conclusion of the chapter, where the Apostle gives the reason of the whole case : “ *For which cause we faint not* ” under these sorrows and sufferings ; they neither discourage nor affright us, but are, on the contrary, the ground of a higher hope ; “ *for though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day* ; for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen,” regard them not as of any real weight or value, “ *but at the things which are not seen* ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” “ *Thus*,” as an ancient prelate observed, “ *the testimony of a good conscience within, the light of God’s countenance from above, and faith’s view of a sorrowless world beyond, put more joy into the heart than any outward thing can put of sorrow.* ”

A.—Truly I see how reasonable it is for a Christian to “ *rejoice evermore* ;” and, by the grace of God, how possible. But what does the Apostle mean in chapter v. 4,—“ *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened* ; not that we would be *unclothed*, but *clothed upon* ? ”

B.—He means that he wished not to remain “ *unclothed*,” or in a disembodied state ; but to be “ *clothed upon* ” with the body glorified at the resurrection. You find a strictly parallel passage in Romans viii. 23 : “ *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within* ”

ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." You see, in both these passages, for what the Apostle *groaned* ;—that only truly perfect state of man, which consists in the eternal union of a glorified body and a glorified spirit.

A.—As the Apostle speaks, in the First Epistle, of his having sent Timothy to this Church, so in this he commends Titus to them, whom he had sent on a like mission. But who was "the brother whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches?" Chapter viii. 18.

B.—All the ancients interpreted this of St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul, who was praised in all the Churches for "the Gospel" which he wrote.

A.—St. Paul, in this Epistle, appears to be very anxious respecting the collection which he was making, in all the Gentile Churches, for the poor Christians of Judea.

B.—And not only anxious for its success, but that these Churches might show the effect of Christianity upon them by their abounding in the grace of liberality. You will not fail to notice also the moving argument by which the Apostle urges every act of this kind upon us: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor; that ye through his poverty might be rich."

A.—And I remark, also, that trust in Providence is another motive urged by the Apostle: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye,

always having a sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

B.—You may also notice an important truth in verse 11.: "Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness ;" where we are taught that, in whatever degree we are enriched by God's providence, the end is *all bountifulness* to others. Thus Christianity triumphed over the selfishness and covetousness of the Gentiles, to whom these were, indeed, new doctrines.

A.—When the Apostle speaks, in chapter xii., of his having known a man in Christ, about fourteen years before, who was caught up into Paradise, does he mean himself ?

B.—So the whole discourse shows. This mode of speaking marks the Apostle's modesty, and indicates, that, although these visions had occurred more than fourteen years before, he had not, it seems, ever mentioned them until now, when, his apostleship having been questioned by his enemies, probably because he was not one of the twelve, he defends it as first committed to him by Christ himself, and afterwards confirmed by various revelations and visions from Him.

A.—What was his thorn in the flesh ?

B.—Conjectures are idle on this point, although they have been largely indulged in. All we can with any probability assert is, that it was some visible bodily infirmity, because he makes allusion to such an affliction in several parts of his writings; especially in Galatians iv. 14: " And my temptation, which was in my flesh, ye despised not."

A.—The apostolic benediction, *in its full form*, occurs, I think, first at the conclusion of this Epistle: “ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.”

B.—And we have here plainly, as in the form of baptism, Matthew xxviii. 19, the names of the SACRED TRINITY. The words contain a prayer for the highest blessings and benefits of which the Corinthians could possibly be made partakers ;—all that love which doth or can flow from the Father ; all that grace which was purchased by the Son ; and all that fellowship and communion with the Holy Spirit, and communication from him, which might render them meet for the service of Christ on earth, and for the full and final enjoyment of him in heaven.

A.—Who were the GALATIANS, to whom St. Paul addresses his next Epistle ?

B.—The inhabitants of Galatia, a part of Asia Minor, which derived its name from the Gauls, who, about 240 years before Christ, took possession of it by force of arms, and settled there. The Churches in Galatia, as before stated, were the fruits of St. Paul’s ministry in the course of his second apostolical journey, which was about the year 51. Some time after his departure, they had been perverted by certain Judaizing teachers, who inculcated the necessity of circumcision, and the observance of the law of Moses. .

A.—Is not the doctrinal argument, on the justification and adoption of believers, pursued in the Epistle to the Galatians, similar to that in the Romans ?

B.—It is, only with this difference, that the same class of Judaizing teachers who had troubled the Church at Antioch, had more expressly taught the Galatian Churches, that circumcision, along with faith in Christ, was necessary to their justification.

A.—What is the substance of the Apostle's argument against this notion?

B.—That when circumcision was enforced as a matter of necessity, and especially as necessary to justification, it implied the denial of the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, and thus re-established the destructive doctrine of justification by the works of the law. It served, therefore, to seduce Christians from their liberty in Christ back again into legal bondage, and so implied a forfeiture of salvation. This strong and just view of the case accounts for the Apostle's great earnestness in this Epistle, and his expostulatory manner of addressing the Galatian Churches.

A.—Judging from St. Paul's defence of his apostleship with which the Epistle commences, it would appear that the Jewish teachers here also, as in Corinth, had represented his authority as inferior to that of the other Apostles.

B.—In defence, therefore, of his equal authority, he says, that although he had been a persecutor, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me," or rather *to me*, and by this revelation, (for it was essential to an Apostle to have *seen* Christ,) he constituted him his messenger "to the Heathen." Further, he says, that when he went up to Jerusalem, and saw Peter, James, and John,

“the pillars” of the Church there, in the conference he had with them, “they added nothing to me,” that is, they neither found fault with his doctrine, nor could teach him any thing more than he had received by revelation from Christ ; and finally, that, so far from being of an inferior office or calling to them, when Peter leaned too much to the Judaizers at Antioch “he withstood him to his face.”

A.—Was there then any difference between St. Paul’s doctrine and that of St. Peter ?

B.—Certainly not ; but the latter carried his compliance with the prejudices of the Jews too far, so as to endanger that liberty which the Gospel gave to the Gentiles from the yoke of the ceremonial law. St. Peter, in this case, evidently yielded to St. Paul ; and so testified his agreement with him. The evil was, that some of the false teachers took occasion from this instance of Peter’s want of firmness, to preach a doctrine which St. Peter himself rejected, and, equally with St Paul, abhorred,—the necessity of circumcision and legal observances in order to justification. The Apostle, therefore, having established his authority, enters upon the proof that we are justified by faith alone, and proceeds to illustrate it, as in the Epistle to the Romans, by the example of Abraham, an instance which concluded the whole case with a consistent Jew, because taken from his own Scriptures. Still further, he shows that the promise to Abraham, “ In thee shall all nations be blessed,” was “a covenant,” in which God had engaged to “justify the *Heathen* through

faith ;" and that this covenant, "which was confirmed before of God in Christ," the Mosaic " law which was four hundred and thirty years after could not disannul." He then teaches that there is no difference between the uncircumcised believing Gentile, and the believing Jew under this new covenant; but that all are "one in Christ Jesus ;" and that as even the Jews themselves under the law were rather servants than sons, so for the believing Gentiles, who had been made the sons of God, and who had received the Spirit of adoption, ("God having sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, *Abba, Father,*") to submit to circumcision and Jewish ordinances, was but to go back into a state of servitude, to forfeit their sonship, and thus to turn again to "weak and beggarly elements ;"—*weak* as having no efficacy to justify, and *beggarly* as not being able to confer the spiritual riches of the Gospel. After this representation, he addresses them in a strain of expostulation, reproof, exhortation, entreaty, and tenderness, the variety and force of which are equally admirable.

A.—What is the import of his allegory respecting Isaac and Ishmael ?

B.—It affords a most appropriate illustration of his argument. For as the child of the free woman Sarah, not the child of the bond slave Hagar, was suffered to inherit ; so he argues, that those under the bondage of Jewish rites being *slaves*, not *sons*, could have no right to the heavenly inheritance. He also intimates that the effect of the teaching of the Judaizers had been to

destroy the moral purity of the Galatians, and that they had not only departed from *charity*, but had also fallen into many grievous sins. This leads him to exhibit a contrasted catalogue of the “works of the flesh” and “the fruits of the Spirit,” and to warn them by the solemn address, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” He then unmasks the hypocrisy of the false teachers; whom he charges with not keeping that law for which they professed to be so zealous, and with desiring to induce the Galatians to submit to circumcision, only that they might glory in having proselyted them, and so avoid persecution from the Jews who did not profess Christianity. This they wished to make their boast: “But,” exclaims the Apostle in one of those fine passages which the fulness of his heart so often pours forth, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;” his perfect and sufficient atonement; “by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world;” so that I am not afraid of persecution for maintaining the truth, and am ready always to offer myself up for its sake.

A.—When was the Epistle to the EPHESIANS written?

B.—About the year 61, during St. Paul’s first imprisonment at Rome. Beside a short visit of three months which he had paid to Ephesus, he spent, as we

have seen, upwards of two years in this celebrated city, where his ministry was eminently successful, and where he wrought many miracles.

A.—Where was Ephesus situated?

B.—It was the capital of Proconsular Asia, and was equally celebrated for its temple of Diana, and for the study of magic arts, for which, indeed, it had been renowned, as we know from heathen writers, for more than a century before the Gospel visited it. A popular form of incantation, used very generally, was called, “the Ephesian words.”

A.—You have already mentioned the conversion of many who used unlawful arts in this city; do you suppose that these had been impostors?

B.—Doubtless the credulity of men was great in that age, so that they might be made the ready dupes of clever pretenders; but it is by no means improbable that many of the wonderful feats which were performed by the magicians, and which gave so much credit and influence to their pretensions, were done by the assistance of evil spirits, whose power over the heathen world, before the propagation of Christianity, was almost absolute.

A.—No faults appear to be charged upon this excellent primitive Church in this Epistle.

B.—It was, like all the other first Churches, composed of Jews and Gentiles, troubled by some of the former, who could not easily admit that the Gentiles stood in an equal Church-relation to God with themselves. Several parts of this Epistle can only

therefore be explained in reference to this long-agitated question.

A.—Please to point them out.

B.—The devout and elevated manner in which the Apostle acknowledges the Divine mercy to them, in the first chapter, is an instance. He blesses “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had chosen them in him before the foundation of the world,” and had “predestinated them to the adoption of children;” having thus made known “the *mystery* of his will;” which “mystery” he further explains in chap. iii. 3—6: “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery, (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ,) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be *fellow heirs, and of the same body*, and partakers of his promises in Christ by the Gospel.”

A.—This subject is also perhaps referred to when the Apostle so often in this Epistle compares the Church of Christ to the human body?

B.—Doubtless it is; for though to compare any society or fellowship of men to a body is a very natural and common figure of speech, yet in this argument it had a peculiar weight. Christ is the head of his body the Church; not of two bodies, Jews and Gentiles, standing in different relations to him, but of the one body the Church, composed of the believers of all

nations, and all standing in the same relation to him. Hence such passages as the following : “There is *one body* and *one Spirit*, even as ye are called in *one hope* of your calling.” “And that he might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in *one body* by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace to you that were afar off, and to them that were nigh ; for through him we *both* have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

A.—He has a noble figure, I also perceive, at the close of the second chapter, taken from a temple.

B.—He has ; but not from the temple of Diana, as some commentators think, but from a temple which was “the habitation of God,” that is, the temple of Solomon. “And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom the whole building *fitly framed together*,” on principles which make both Jew and Gentile *one*, “groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye,” Jewish and Gentile believers, “are builded *together*, for a habitation of God through the Spirit.”

A.—I thank you for this key to the meaning of this Epistle.

B.—But this will carry you but a little way into the true interpretation of the Apostle’s doctrine in these statements as to the calling of the Gentiles. They were put in possession of the external privileges of the Gospel by the sending forth of the Ministers of Christ to break down the middle wall of partition, and to

preach to them ; but by this “calling,” as the Apostle terms it, they were invited to the highest spiritual blessings, and by faith they became the partakers of them. It is not of merely outward religious advantages that the Apostle speaks ; but of these as the actual instruments of a personal salvation, which God designed them by this means to receive. These blessings are exhibited in the richest phrase, and in passages of the highest eloquence, in this Epistle. They were thus “chosen in Christ,” according to God’s “eternal purpose,” that they should be “reconciled to God,” be “holy and without blame before him in love,” that they should be “quickened with Christ,” and “made to sit with him in heavenly places ;” and be “created in Christ unto good works.” This is farther illustrated by that comprehensive prayer for them, which you will find in chap. xiv. 22, with its concluding doxology, in which all language seems to fail to express the Apostle’s mighty conceptions of the value, glory, and riches of the spiritual and heavenly blessings which our “calling” offers to us Gentiles, as matters of personal experience.

A.—With your leave, I will read the passage : “For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.”

B.—A sense of his presence being always maintained,

and his vital hallowing influence being always exerted there, through a living faith in him.

A.—“That ye, being rooted and grounded in love,” metaphors, I suppose, taken from the growth of trees, “may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with the fulness of God.”

B.—“Here,” says a pious critic, “by a bold and beautiful metaphor, the dimensions of material substances are raised above their native signification, and ennobled by being applied to the mysteries of religion; and thus St. Paul expresses the majesty, the absolute and entire perfection, and the immense charity, of the wonderful work of our redemption; the knowledge of which passeth all other knowledge, both in its own immense greatness, and the grand concern mankind has in it, and can never be so perfectly known by created understandings, as that they shall either fully comprehend, or duly value, such an adorable mystery and infinite blessing.”\*

A.—And the doxology to which you referred, is equally elevated: “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end! Amen.”

B.—And this you are always to bear in mind, that these are not merely elevated *words*; that the *subject* is always greater than the expression, however strong it

\* Blackwall.

may be; that the spiritual blessings promised us in the Gospel do in fact transcend all human thought, as well as human language; and that their fulness can never be exhausted, even in eternity. Thus we may be ever asking, and ever receiving, because we ask from God, who gives without being exhausted; we ask through Christ, whose merits claim for us a grace which the Apostle delights to represent by the terms, "riches;" "unsearchable riches;" "riches of his glory," &c.; and we are under "the working of the mighty power" of his Spirit, "the power that worketh in us," enlarging the desires and the moral capacity of believers for ever to enjoy more and more of God.

A.—In chapter iv. 11, the Apostle speaks of the different orders of ministers which Christ had appointed in his Church. Some of these were, I presume, temporary?

B.—All but the last. It was essential to an APOSTLE to have seen Christ, and from him to have received his commission to be a witness of his resurrection. On this ground, St. Paul, you may observe, frequently defends his own Apostleship: "Am not I an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" This office therefore could not extend beyond the life of those who first sustained it. "Prophets" were also temporary ministers. They were either persons endowed with the gift of prophecy, one of the miraculous powers of the first Churches, or more probably, like "Apollos," their gift and office was to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures, chiefly with reference to the

conversion of the Jews, proving from them, “that Jesus was the Christ.” “Evangelists” acted as the delegates of the Apostles, and by them were vested with authority to regulate the affairs of Churches, to repress disorders, and to ordain ministers over them. As for their authority, it appears to have been derived from the Apostles, and their office to have expired at their own death ; certain it is, that the term Evangelist does not describe a permanent order of ministers, because the Apostles left no direction to them to ordain successors. “Pastors and Teachers,” that is, Pastors who teach, were the standing ministers appointed in the Church, and these are sometimes called “Bishops” or “Overseers,” sometimes “Presbyters ;” the same order of men being intended. As, in the larger Churches, several Pastors or Presbyters were necessary, so they formed a Council, over which the senior Presbyter, or one elected for eminence of piety or talents, presided ; and to him afterwards the term Bishop came to be exclusively applied.

A.—The Presbyters were then something like the rulers of a synagogue, and the Bishop, or chief pastor, like the chief ruler of a synagogue.

B.—This model appears to have been followed by the Apostles ; and hence, as the chief ruler of a synagogue was called also the *angel* of the synagogue, so the chief or presiding presbyter in the primitive Churches obtained that appellation ; as, in the Book of Revelation, we read, “To the angel,” or chief minister, “of the Church at Ephesus write.”

A.—The Epistles also relate to matters of *discipline*. Since this subject is connected with what is now called “Church *order*,” allow me to ask what is meant by that term?

B.—By it is meant that *order* and *government* of the Church, by means of which it is trained up in knowledge and holiness, rendered “the light of the world,” and its members made meet for heaven.

A.—What do the Apostles teach on this subject?

B.—That God’s ministers are his ambassadors to the world, to invite men to be reconciled to God on the terms he proposes, and to denounce the punishment which must follow their rejection; and that they are the “pastors” of his Churches, to instruct them in wholesome doctrine, to enforce upon them by counsel, exhortation, and persuasion, the laws of Christ; to watch over them with care, lest any errors or other evils come in among them; to comfort the tempted and feeble-minded; to warn the unruly; and to put away those who dishonour the Christian profession by persevering in improper conduct. They teach also that it is the duty of all who receive Christ’s doctrine, to come out from the world, and to confess Christ by uniting themselves to his Church by public and avowed union with some branch of it; to communicate at the Lord’s table; to walk by the laws of Christ in all things; to pray for their ministers; to honour and uphold them in the right discharge of their office; to observe the regular assembling of themselves together; to cultivate brotherly love; to be of “one

mind and judgment ;” to avoid schisms and disputings ; to communicate to the wants of their poor brethren, and to assist zealously and with constancy in promoting the salvation of all men. On all these topics the apostolic directions are very copious and explicit.

A.—What more is there particularly noticeable in this Epistle ?

B.—It is, throughout, full of beautiful and affecting passages ; and you may remark especially those representations of the moral state of Heathens, of which the Ephesians were reminded, in order to excite their gratitude to Christ, who had rescued them from it. Here are none of those soft and palliating views of superstition and idolatry which you find in some writers. The Ephesians in their pagan state were “dead in trespasses and sins,” “afar off,” “aliens,” “having no hope, and without God in the world.” You will, no doubt, also notice his exhortations to relative duties, and the forcible manner in which he urges them ; and you can scarcely pass unnoticed his vigorous description of the Christian’s warfare, and the metaphors taken from the armour of the soldiery of that time, with which the Epistle concludes. Mark first your enemies. The grand leader of them is “the devil,” who, like a skilful commander, has his “wiles,” his various stratagems and arts to overcome. Under him are ranged our other enemies ; for we war “not against flesh and blood ;” that is, not only with flesh and blood, but “against principalities, against powers,

against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

A.—What may be his meaning?

B.—He clearly shows a subordination, order, and government among evil spirits, with which we are not made acquainted, further than by the enunciation of the fact. The terms, however, show a system of temptation organized against us by invisible and malignant powers, which we cannot resist but in that armour of God which the Apostle, therefore, so solemnly exhorts us to put on.

A.—The parts of this armour he himself explains; and the description, I perceive, is taken from the ancient military defensive and offensive weapons,—the helmet, the girdle, the breastplate, the sandal defended by iron or brass, the shield, and the sword used for close combat.

B.—And that which they represent, are "truth;" "righteousness;" "peace;" "faith;" "salvation;" or, as the Apostle elsewhere explains the helmet, "the hope of salvation;" and knowledge of "the word of God," which is that sword of the Spirit whose edge, when wielded by our Lord in his temptation, the tempter so keenly felt.

A.—In this armour the Christian must surely conquer.

B.—No, not by the armour only, but by strength from above to keep it on, and courageously to use it; and hence the Apostle adds, "Praying always with all prayer," &c.

A.—Who were the **PHILIPPIANS**, to whom the next Epistle is addressed?

B.—They were inhabitants of Philippi, a city of Macedonia, so called from king Philip. The Gospel was first preached there by St. Paul about the year 51. The Philippians having heard of St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome, sent Epaphroditus, one of their members, to convey to him the assurances of their affection, and to offer him a supply of money for his necessities; and by him this instructive Epistle was returned, about the year 61, or 62. It breathes throughout the spirit of true pastoral tenderness towards a very beloved Church.

A.—In the first chapter I perceive, beside some very beautiful and highly spiritual petitions which he offers up for the Philippian Church, the Apostle appears anxious to assure them that his imprisonment had “fallen out rather for the furtherance of the Gospel.”

B.—This was a consolatory topic, especially to weak believers, who might think that the imprisonment of so great an instrument of spreading and defending the Gospel might greatly check its progress. You see, however, that God can carry on his work by his servants whether at liberty or in bonds; for, the imprisonment of St. Paul for the sake of Christ appears to have produced religious inquiries even “in the palace” of Cæsar, and “in all other places.” Among the great, too, it is probable that several converts were made; so that “the brethren” at Rome were encouraged, by the example of the Apostle, to preach the word with greater boldness themselves.

A.—Some, however, he informs us, preached Christ out of contention, and in opposition to himself.

B.—These were probably Jewish teachers, like those who distracted other Churches, and who would not be well-disposed to the Apostle because of his being the champion of the equality of the Gentile believers; a doctrine which he had largely laid down in his Epistle to the Church at Rome written a few years before.

A.—His joy in the fact that Christ was preached, although the zeal of these preachers might be much excited by a desire to turn the attention of the Christians of Rome from St. Paul's "hired house" to the places where they themselves addressed their congregations, and might be occasionally accompanied by animadversions upon himself, appears a noble proof of his public spirit.

B.—It is so; and it argues no small degree of the influence of Christianity upon our minds, when we can lose all selfish considerations in the advancement of "the common salvation."

A.—From some expressions which follow, it would seem that St. Paul was doubtful as to the issue of his trial before Cæsar.

B.—But he gives us an impressive example of the truly devoted Christian; he is concerned to live only to be useful, otherwise he desires, as to all personal reasons, "to depart and to be with Christ," which he knew would be "far better." In all, however, he had but one end, "that Christ should be magnified in his body whether by life or by death." And how truly

exempt from care and fear is that Christian who can say with him, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain !”

A.—In the next chapter the Apostle is very urgent in his affectionate persuasives to love and unity.

B.—Nor must you overlook the prominence which he gives to humility ; a grace, the cultivation of which we are all too apt to neglect, so that sins against humility do not so deeply pierce our consciences as sins against many of the other virtues of Christianity.

A.—And yet it is said, “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

B.—Here, too, the Apostle connects “strife and vain-glory” together, and thus teaches us the source of almost all dissensions in the Church ; he prescribes also the true guard against all “schisms” in the body of Christ.

A.—I presume you refer to his exhortation, “In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

B.—And do you mark the great and affecting argument by which he enforces this “lowliness of mind” upon us ?

A.—It is taken from the humiliation of our Lord, “who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

B.—These words also contain incidentally the most unequivocal declaration of the absolute Divinity of our Saviour, so that it has been well said, they alone are sufficient for the refutation of all heresies against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. “It is evident,” says a learned prelate, “from this scripture that Christ was as much in the form of God, as in the form of a servant, and did as really subsist in the Divine nature as in the nature of man. For he was so in the form of God as thereby to be equal with God; but no other form beside the essential, which is the Divine nature itself, could infer an equality with God. There can be but one infinite, eternal, and independent Being; and there can be no comparison between that and whatsoever is finite, temporal, and depending. He therefore who did think himself equal with God, as being in the form of God, must be conceived to subsist in that one infinite, eternal, and independent nature of God.”

A.—This is most evident; but I remark that St. Paul breaks away from the humiliation of our Lord into the most lofty description of his exaltation to the highest glory, and his universal dominion over all creatures.

B.—These rapid transitions characterize the writings of St. Paul, and form one of those peculiarities which must be kept in view by the reader, who will not so well interpret him unless he familiarize himself to his manner. When the glory of Christ’s person; the greatness of his love to man; the riches of his grace; and his mediatorial exaltation, come before him, his

spirit always appears to kindle with these great subjects; and, in the powerful passages which under such emotions he writes, he lays down the most important doctrines, and presents them under views the most illustrative and striking.

A.—What is the meaning of the Apostle when he says, chap. ii. 17, “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all?”

B.—This passage is another instance that St. Paul was familiar with the prospect of martyrdom, and not only calmly contemplated, but joyfully anticipated it. The allusion which he here makes is to the Jewish sacrifices. They were prepared for the altar on which they were offered by the Levites and Priests; this was their “service;” and a libation of wine or oil was also poured upon the sacrifice. If then, says the Apostle, I can but render you Gentiles an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord, should my blood be poured out as the libation upon this sacrifice, I should rejoice to die in your service, and for the confirmation of your faith. Zeal for God, affection for them, and regard to their salvation, could not be more strongly or more elegantly expressed.

A.—The third chapter appears to be intended to warn them against those constant troublers of the primitive Gentile Churches, the Jewish zealots.

B.—And the means which the Apostle adopts to prevent the Philippians from being seduced into a dependence upon the Mosaic institutions is the most con-

vincing; he places his own example before them, as that of a man who had been most zealous for the law; who had studied Jewish literature with the utmost care; who had been of the strictest sect of adherents to the law, the Pharisees; and whose zeal for the law and connexions in life had opened to him the fairest prospects of honour and advantage; and yet he had counted all loss for “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,” and, so far from having repented of this after so long an experience, he still “counted them but dung that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which was of God by faith.”

A.—Then follows, I perceive, one of those allusions to the public foot-races of the Greeks, to which you have already referred.

B.—Yes; you see this great Apostle still in the full effort of his high career. “Not as though I had already attained, or were already *perfect*,” a term used by the Greeks for the racer who had arrived at the goal; “but I follow after, that I may *apprehend* that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus,” that is, that I may *lay hold* of my crown, of which I do not reckon myself sure until I have it in actual possession. “This one thing I do,” being intent on one thing only, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth,” the natural action of an eager racer, who, whether on foot or in the chariot race, bends forward, “to those things which are before, I press toward the

mark," the goal, above which the judges sat, "for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

A.—What was that "care" of the Philippians for the Apostle, which he mentions in chapter iv. 10?

B.—The supply of money which they had sent to their venerated friend and father in his imprisonment; and the handsome and dignified manner in which he acknowledges the favour, is worthy your attention: "But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: Every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." So grateful was this great man for every token of Christian affection from the Churches; and he was so truly great that he could enjoy his fulness with sanctity, and bear his wants without complaining.

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## CONVERSATION XXIII.

### EPISTLES TO THE COLOSSIANS AND THESSALONIANS.

A.—Who were the Colossians?

B.—The Christians of Colosse, a city of Phrygia, in

Asia Minor. The Colossians, also, like the Philippians, having heard of St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome, sent Epaphras thither to inform him of their affairs, and to inquire respecting his welfare. Epaphras was cast into prison at Rome, having, it is supposed, provoked the displeasure of the Government by his zeal in preaching the Gospel. The Apostle therefore sent this Epistle by Tychicus and Onesimus, about the same time as he transmitted that to the Philippians by Epaphroditus.

A.—What are the leading topics treated upon in this Epistle?

B.—It bears a great resemblance to the Epistle to the Ephesians in those parts which relate to the spiritual blessings, into the enjoyment of which, Christianity introduces believers, and in those practical and relative duties which it so largely enforces; but the doctrinal parts are dissimilar, and show that the Church of Colosse, and the neighbouring Church of Laodicea, to which St. Paul directs his Epistle to be sent, were exposed to danger from a variety of false doctrines.

A.—What does the Apostle mean by “the philosophy and vain deceit,” against which the Colossians are warned?

B.—It is not likely that the Apostle referred to one particular system, or sect. That age was remarkable for an affectation of philosophic wisdom, and for eager and endless disputations on *angels*; on *aeons*, a species of imaginary superior beings, immediately emanating from God, and possessed of various powers and offices; on the creation of the world; on an eternal good and evil prin-

ciple ; on the origin and cause of evil ; on fate, free-will, the influence of matter on morals, and a thousand other minuter points and distinctions, to each of which was attached the greatest importance ; so that strenuous efforts were made by each teacher of philosophy to gain disciples in order to increase his own honour and that of his sect. The Platonists of Alexandria had formed themselves into several divisions, and had mingled various Jewish opinions and traditions with their speculations ; the Hellenistic Jews had compounded a system out of the Greek and Oriental philosophy, and their own cabalistic and allegorizing dreams ; and the sect of the Gnostics, so called from their affectation of superior and certain *knowledge*, and who had amalgamated some Christians doctrines with the impious, mystic, or ridiculous tenets they had adopted from every other quarter, were now perhaps begining to spread their baneful influence in the Churches. This show of wisdom, recommended often by logical subtlety and by a captivating eloquence, placed many of the primitive Churches in danger ; and especially when popular teachers among themselves professed to exalt Christianity to the dignity, as they thought, of philosophy, and to show its agreement with the leading principles of the system adopted by the celebrated philosophers of the day. The effect as to *doctrine* was, that the truths of the Gospel began to be interpreted mystically, or allegorically, in order to make them accord with these wild and visionary schemes ; so that its simplicity, truth, and efficacy were at once subverted,

whilst the moral effect was to occupy the attention with unprofitable and endless disputation ; to turn men from the marvellous light of the Gospel into the dark and bewildering mazes of heathen speculation on abstract subjects ; and to seduce the heart and conduct from the sanctifying control of the Gospel of Christ, leaving them to their own unchecked corruption, and to the infection of a grossly immoral state of society. Hence it is that the Apostles so constantly connect the influence both of the philosophizing and Judaizing teachers which infested the primitive Churches, not only with the loss of simplicity and good temper, but with great and flagrant vices: Of this you will see many instances in the subsequent Epistles of St. Paul. Almost all the false teachers whom St. Paul opposes, appear to have been of licentious habits ; to have endeavoured to justify a lax and unholy conduct by some perverted principle of religion ; and thus to corrupt the manners, as well as the opinions, of Christians.

A.—This contest between true Christianity, and a system corrupted and debased by this admixture of philosophy and demonology, continued, I believe, for a considerable time after the death of the Apostles?

B.—But the principles laid down in the apostolical Epistles, laid a firm ground from which the champions of truth among the early Fathers assailed the various heresies of this kind which from time to time appeared ; and with such success, that the most popular systems, known afterwards under the general name of Gnosticism, and which were springing up in

the time of the Apostles, came at length to be so greatly forgotten, that it has required much investigation on the part of the learned to obtain from various scattered sources any tolerable account of the leading opinions which distinguished the various philosophic sects, whose teachers troubled the early Churches. Errors of another kind were indeed introduced, which afterwards led to apostasy; but the great principles which had been brought directly out of the Greek and Oriental philosophy, such as the eternity of matter; the impossibility of a creation out of nothing; the necessary power of sin in souls whilst united to matter; the forming of the material world by an evil deity; the necessary and eternal opposition between Christ the restorer, and the subordinate malignant deity who had formed the world; the existence of the body of Christ in appearance only, because they could not conceive that he would ally himself to a material body; and the denial of a literal resurrection of the body arising from the notion of the inherent evil in all matter;—these and some others were at length banished from the Church. They did not first arise out of the Church, you are to observe, for they existed long before in various forms; but for a considerable time they troubled it, and created schisms. The stand which Christianity made against these principles, false in philosophy and most pernicious in their influence upon morals, there is no doubt, laid the foundation of that better philosophy for which later times have been celebrated; and by its steady support of a few great

first principles as to the Divine nature ; the creation out of nothing ; the unity and supremacy of the Godhead ; the passive nature of matter, &c. ; it at once rescued man's intellect from the dominion of a wild imagination, and placed morals on the ground of obligation and responsibility.

A.—There is probably some allusion to the Gnostic errors in the first chapter of this Epistle, where Christ is said to have created the angels.

B.—This philosophy abounded in wild imaginings as to angels and other beings superior to them, some of whom were supposed to have emanated from God countless ages before time begun ; and there is reason to believe, that, in the attempts made to accommodate Christianity to it, our Lord had been assumed to be one, perhaps the first, of these emanations. The Apostle therefore for ever fenced Christianity against this insidious offer of compromise between it and the philosophy of the world by asserting, not only that Christ “created all things,” but that in this he included things “in heaven,” as well as things “in earth ; all “invisible” things, as well as “visible ;” all real existences, however high, whether “thrones or dominions or principalities or powers,” in which terms he includes all the orders of superior intelligences. He states further, that he “is before all things, and that by him all things consist,” that is, they have a being wholly dependent upon him. The philosophers offered to exalt Christ into the first rank of many glorious beings who in eternity *emanated* from the Father. But

St. Paul indignantly spurns the overture, and asserts that Christ is the eternal Son ; and that so far from any other being emanating from the Father, not one of them was so produced ; but that they came into being in the mode of *creation*, and that not only “by the Son,” but “for him,” to be his subjects and servants.

A.—No words could place this fundamental and all-important doctrine in a stronger light. But in chapter ii., he appears to guard them against the Jewish teachers.

B.—These might be philosophizing teachers also, for the Jews, I have said, were in that day greatly infected with this kind of philosophy, which they studied in the Greek cities ; and yet were often furiously zealous for the forms of the ceremonial law. They wished to seduce the Gentile Christians to the observance of Jewish sabbaths, holidays, and new moons, and to submit to that great sign of proselytism,—circumcision. But the Apostle dissipates the whole by declaring that believers were “complete” in Christ, and needed nothing for edification or salvation, but faith in him, the gift of his Spirit, and obedience to his laws. For the same reason he cautions them against “worshipping angels,” which the Jews of that corrupt age practised and taught ;—a practice which he denounces as a renunciation of Christ as “THE HEAD ;” to whom, therefore, all honour and worship must be paid, and on whom exclusively all *trust* ought to rest.

A.—Does not this prohibition lie as forcibly against the popish worship of angels?

B.—Most undoubtedly; and when the Apostle guards the Colossians against being beguiled into this practice by “a voluntary humility,” because those ancient deceivers pretended that we were not worthy to draw near to God, through Christ, without first applying ourselves to angels; he exposes the hollowness of the same pretext which the Church of Rome, to this day, sets up for its worship of saints and angels, in order to gain them over to become mediators for the guilty: —“There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”

A.—The remainder of the Epistle contains exhortations to various duties.

B.—And I would advise you to commit the third chapter to memory, that its important directions may never be absent from your mind. With this view many of the practical parts of St. Paul’s Epistles might also most profitably be got off by heart by young persons; but this chapter has a peculiar variety in its beautiful and heavenly exhortations. Spiritual mindedness, the mortification of the sinful appetites of the body, the laying aside of “anger, malice, blasphemy,” that is, censorious speaking, “impure conversation and lying,” the cultivation of “meekness, humbleness of mind, forbearance,” and other benevolent affections, storing the mind richly with the word of God, singing his high praises in social companies, doing all things to the glory of God, and various relative duties, are

the subjects of apostolic exhortation in this instructive chapter, and are at once expressed with the most attractive simplicity, and enforced by the most persuasive and commanding motives. Read these Divine counsels, my dear young friend, with greater attention than ever ; and make it the subject of your earnest and constant prayers, that you may have grace fully to order your principles, your temper, and your conduct by them.

A.—The next Epistle is addressed to the **THESSALONIANS**. We have an account of the introduction of the Gospel into that city, (which was, I believe, at that time the capital of Macedonia,) in *Acts xvii. 1—9* ; and of St. Paul's expulsion by the tumult excited by the unbelieving Jews. When was this Epistle written ?

B.—From Thessalonica St. Paul went to Berea, and from thence to Athens. From Athens he sent Timothy to Thessalonica, to confirm the new converts. Upon Timothy's rejoining St. Paul, some time afterward, at Corinth, it is supposed that the Apostle wrote this Epistle grounded upon the favourable, and, to St. Paul, the very joyful, report which Timothy had made of their spirituality and steadfastness. This is supposed to have been the first written of St. Paul's Epistles, and to bear date about A. D. 48.

A.—It does not appear to have any references to the questions raised in other Churches by Judaizing teachers.

B.—The reason probably is, that this Church was composed almost exclusively of Gentile converts.

A.—What are its particular characters ?

B.—The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is written in a strain of great commendation, earnestness, and affection; and has a striking passage on the general resurrection, which communicates some deeply interesting particulars as to that event. Christians are forbidden to indulge in that excessive lamentation for the dead which characterized the Gentiles, who sorrowed as men who had “no hope;” and in order to console them under the death of their friends, the Thessalonians are assured that “them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him,” at his second coming. He then reveals to them and to the Church the following particulars;—that the saints who are alive when Christ shall come, shall not be changed as to their bodies and glorified before those who have died in the Lord shall rise from the grave. They “shall not prevent,” or go before, them that sleep; but “the dead in Christ shall rise first;” that is, before the living saints shall be transformed and ascend to meet him; so that the whole Church shall be glorified at once: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up *together with them* in the clouds, and so shall be for ever with the Lord.” The whole scene, as here represented, is wonderfully impressive. “The Lord himself descends from heaven with a shout,” the shout of the thousand times ten thousand who attend his glorious second advent, and usher it in by their acclamations; and with “the voice of the archangel,” some particular and exalted angel, excelling all the rest in elevation of nature and office, and acting as the leader and marshal of the ministering host; and with

“the trump of God ;” that very sound which struck so much dread into the Israelites, when the law was given ; so that they said, “Let not God speak to us any more, lest we die.” What a scene to be disclosed in an instant to the wicked ! What sounds to burst at once upon them in the midst of their business and pleasures ! “They shall *wail*,” says another Apostle, “because of him.” Not so “the saints who are alive at his coming.” They “assure their hearts before him,” and wait the issue. The dead in Christ then rise ; in the same moment the yet mortal living are “changed ;” and the whole redeemed host, invested with glory and immortality, ascend “to meet the Lord in the air, and so,” after their public justification, and the condemnation of the wicked, “shall be for ever with the Lord.”

A.—This grand event, which shall close the history of our world, ought surely never to be absent from our thoughts.

B.—And let us never forget that the only true work of our life is, to give “all diligence that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” *Found* by Christ we must be : Let us “watch and pray always,” that we may be “found *in* him.”

A.—What is there remarkable in THE SECOND EPIS-  
TLE TO THE THESSALONIANS ?

B.—From what the Apostle had said, in his first Epistle, on the final judgment, they had erroneously concluded that “the day of Christ” was very near, even “at hand ;” and the correction of this misconception leads the Apostle to pronounce a most distinct

and important prophecy respecting a grand “*apostasy*” in the Church, and the rise, reign, and ultimate destruction of “*the man of sin* ;” all which events he informs them, must take place before the end of time and the coming of Christ to judgment.

A.—Thus in St. Paul the spirit of prophecy was added to his other “*spiritual gifts*.”

B.—And his apostolic office and inspiration have been confirmed to all ages, by the accomplishment of the prophetic part of his writings.

A.—What power is represented by “*the man of sin, the son of perdition*,” mentioned chapter ii. 3?

B.—“*The falling away*,” or *apostasy*, spoken of immediately before, shows that this power was not either heathen or Mohammedan. Only the Church can *fall away* from previous faith and purity; and this *apostasy* must also be principally charged upon the Church of Rome, because, although other Churches have also departed from the faith, yet we do not see their *apostasy* systematized, and gathered up under one *HEAD*, here called “*the man of sin*.” No other Church, however fallen, except the Church of Rome, can therefore answer to this description.

A.—This is a remarkable difference; but in what does the *apostasy* of the Church of Rome consist?

B.—In substituting other mediators, beside the “*one Mediator*,” Jesus Christ; in worshipping images; invoking saints and angels; offering prayers and praises to the Virgin Mary, and advancing her into a kind of deity; teaching the merit of works; assuming the power

to forgive sins ; inventing, or at least adopting from paganism, the unscriptural and corrupting doctrine of purgatory ; rendering the Lord's Supper an idolatrous rite, by worshipping the host ; giving to her traditions an authority equal to the word of God ; keeping that word from the people ; and crowning all these, and other fundamental subversions of pure Christianity, by inculcating hatred, rancour, and violence, against all other Churches, in contempt of that CHARITY without which no man can be a disciple of Christ.

A.—Then “the man of sin” is the Pope.

B.—Not this or that particular Pope, but the Pope in general, as the head and chief of this apostasy.

A.—Why is he called “the man of sin,” and “the son of perdition ?”

B.—“Not only on account of the scandalous lives of many Popes, but by reason of their more scandalous doctrines and principles ; dispensing with the most necessary duties, and granting, or rather selling, pardons and indulgences to the most abominable crimes. Or if by sin be meant *idolatry* in particular, as it is frequently called in the Old Testament, the more emphatically to mark its immoral tendencies, it is evident that the Pope has corrupted the worship of God, and perverted it from ‘spirit and truth’ to superstition and idolatry of the grossest kind. He is also, like the false Apostle Judas, called ‘the son of perdition ;’ whether actively, as being the cause of destruction to others, or passively, as being devoted to destruction himself.’ ” \*

\* Bishop Newton.

A.—I have turned to the chapter, and find in the fourth verse characters so remarkable applied to this “man of sin,” that, if they are found in the Popes, they must certainly be intended in the prophecy.

B.—These are, that “he opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God ;” that is, above emperors and kings, called “gods” among the Gentiles ; “or that is worshipped ;” that is, receives the highest reverence among men ; and that “he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God ;” ostentatiously claiming supremacy over all the powers of the earth. This is a true picture of the arrogance of the Popedom. The man of sin is *an opposer*, an adversary, excommunicating, anathematizing, persecuting, and destroying ; drenched with the blood of saints, and of the wars produced by his ambitious policy. He has *exalted himself* above all emperors, kings, and princes ; deposing some, advancing others ; obliging them to prostrate themselves before him, to kiss his toe, and often to submit to other and more humbling acknowledgments of inferiority. Nay, he has exalted himself above the true God himself ; setting aside what his word enjoins, and enjoining what it forbids ; and so, even whilst calling himself the Vicar of Christ, utterly displacing and usurping his authority in his Church ; and is therefore, more properly than any other power, called **ANTICHRIST**.

A.—Perhaps his *sitting in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*, may refer to the pomp of his inauguration, of which I have read : For he then sits

upon the high altar of St. Peter's at Rome, and receives adoration from the assembled multitude.

B.—Thus every Pope at his installation fulfils this prophecy, and applies it to himself before all the world. But he has also assumed Divine attributes and titles ; as holiness and infallibility, and the power of forgiving sins ; and has been styled, and allowed himself to be styled, “Our Lord God the Pope, a God upon earth, King of kings, and Lord of lords :” And these blasphemies have not been merely the uncensured extravagancies of private writers, but the language of public decretals and acts of Council.

A.—The picture is, indeed, most accurate.

B.—But the Apostle, you will observe, adds other notices of “the man of sin ;” as “signs, lying wonders,” or false miracles, “all deceivableness of unrighteousness,” and a widely prevailing “delusion,” owing to God having given up an unfaithful and corrupt Church in his wrath, “because they received not the love of the truth.”

A.—And all this appears to have been remarkably fulfilled in the monstrous and wicked impositions which the Popish priesthood have ever practised upon the credulity of the ignorant, and in that infatuated spirit of idolatry and superstition which formerly spread through the greater part of the world, and which still renders millions of persons in Europe, Asia, and America, wholly blind to the truth and excellency of the Scriptures.

B.—Yes ; and it very much resembles that passion

for pagan superstition and idolatry which marked the early periods of the world.

A.—It is a great satisfaction, however, to see this dark empire of error, sin, and persecution, weakened and approaching its fall.

B.—And this has been effected, as stated by the Apostle, by “the brightness of our Lord’s coming,” and by “the spirit of his mouth,” which is the pure word of God. By the preaching of its truths, and the translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar tongues of different nations, the glorious Reformation was rendered successful; and by the same means will the final victory of the Church over antichrist be effected.

A.—The Epistles of Paul next following are addressed to individuals: Two were written to **TIMOTHY**.

B.—This eminent Evangelist was, from a youth, greatly beloved by St. Paul; and he stands in the sacred page as an interesting example to the young. His father was a Greek of Lystra, but his mother a Jewess, by whom he was early instructed in the Scriptures. Himself, his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois, all appear to have been the fruits of St. Paul’s ministry, on his first visit to Lycaonia. When St. Paul was on his second great evangelical tour, he took Timothy along with him from Lystra; where, young as he was, he had made himself eminent in the Church by his zeal and piety. He was afterwards ordained to the ministry by the laying on of the hands of St. Paul and those of the presbyters; after which he was often deputed by St. Paul, and invested with his authority, to regulate the

affairs of several of the Churches. For this ministry he receives, in these Epistles, very solemn and important advices. He finally suffered martyrdom at Ephesus.

A.—When was this Epistle written?

B.—The most probable opinion appears to be, that it was written soon after St. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome.

A.—It contains many affectionate cautions against the philosophic and Judaizing disputings of which you have spoken.

B.—And the severe and highly descriptive manner in which the Apostle speaks of them, is worthy of remark. He characterizes them as “fables,” “endless genealogies,” “questions and strifes of words;” and he as strongly marks their moral influence, when he calls the disputants “proud, though knowing nothing,” and their disputings “perverse,” “whereof cometh envy, strife, railing,” &c. Although these particular errors, arising out of a speculative philosophy, have disappeared, yet are the censures still of great use in showing the evil of the principles from which they proceeded; for such principles will, in every age, produce errors, of some kind or other, fatal to truth and piety. “They may teach us,” says one, “to mistrust the wisdom of man, when it is not enlightened and sanctified from above; that the human mind may build up systems, and may wander up and down through the regions of theory; but that truth is seated in the throne of God; and that he alone can arrive at truth who, at the foot of that throne, lays his hopes, his wishes, and his

reason." THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY was written during St. Paul's second imprisonment at Rome, and not long before his martyrdom. It is marked by the strongest affection, and, like the former Epistle, abounds in ministerial directions and solemn charges. It is rendered peculiarly interesting, as containing what may be considered as the Apostle's dying testimony ; and shows that, when he most needed the supports of his faith, they did not fail him. He died as he lived, full of the hopes and assurances of a blissful immortality : " For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand : I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day ; and not to me only, but unto all those who love his appearing." So died the greatest and most useful mere man that perhaps ever lived.

A.—The language of this interesting passage is taken, I perceive, from the Grecian games.

B.—In part. The first metaphor is taken from warfare in general,—he had been a faithful and courageous soldier of Christ ; the second is taken from the public races,—he had completed his course of strenuous effort ; the third is taken from the fidelity of servants in keeping the property entrusted to them,—for thus St. Paul had preserved the great deposit of the Christian faith committed to him as an Apostle. The agonistic allusion is then again resumed, and, in reference to the judge of the Grecian games, who dispensed the

“ crowns ” to the conquerors, the Lord is called “ the righteous Judge,” from whom he confidently looked, not for the perishable Olympic wreath, but for “ that crown of glory which fadeth not away.”

A.—The Epistle to TITUS appears similar in its design to those of Timothy.

B.—Titus was a Greek, sometimes a companion of St. Paul, and occasionally, like Timothy, deputed as an Evangelist, with authority from the Apostle, to order the affairs of the Churches, by appointing ministers, and correcting their abuses. The principal design of this Epistle is to give Titus directions for the management of his important office among the Churches raised up in Crete. All the three preceding Epistles are of the first moment to the Church, as they exhibit to Christian ministers the most perfect idea of the duties of their function; teach the manner in which these duties should be performed; describe the qualifications necessary in those who are to be entrusted with those holy offices; and exhibit to the people those ends for which the ministry is instituted, and the powers with which Christ has invested his servants, to banish strange doctrines, to reprove, and ultimately to put away, offenders against the Church’s peace and purity, and to maintain the laws and ordinances of Christ.

A.—Who was PHILEMON, to whom St. Paul addresses a short Epistle?

B.—A convert of St. Paul’s, residing in Colosse. The occasion of writing to him was the sending back a slave who had absconded from his master Philemon, and

fled to Rome, and was there converted by the preaching of the Apostle. He asks for him his master's pardon, and generously promises to pay the value of any thing of which Onesimus had wronged him. It is an important Epistle, as showing that although Christianity did not violently interfere with the civil condition of men, it commenced an ameliorating process favourable to all the oppressed. There is nothing in it, surely, which can be interpreted to favour the practice of slavery *among Christians*! St. Paul requests Philemon to receive the fugitive, no longer "as a slave, but as a brother beloved in the Lord." This Epistle has always been admired for the delicacy and address with which it is written; and it places in a most interesting view the amiable and benevolent character of this great Apostle.

A.—To whom was THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS addressed?

B.—To the Christians of Judea, who were called *Hebrews*, in distinction from the Jews born in Greek or other foreign cities. The latter were called *Hellenists* or *Grecians*, because, for the most part, they used the Greek language.

A.—What was the design of this Epistle?

B.—It is one of St. Paul's great doctrinal Epistles, in which he proves, in order to establish the believing Hebrews in the faith, that the Gospel is not only superior to the Mosaic institutions; but that the latter were strikingly and designedly typical of it. Into this subject, a point which had been only incidentally men-

tioned in other Epistles, he now enters very largely; as writing to the believing Jews of Palestine.

A.—Then, as in the Epistle to the Romans he speaks chiefly of the moral law, so in this he dwells upon the ceremonial law.

B.—And for this reason, that his design in writing to the Romans was to establish the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ; but here his principal purpose was to prove that Christianity was a perfect dispensation of the covenant of grace, appointed to supersede the shadowy and prefigurative dispensation of Moses; and that their trust for salvation ought therefore to be steadfastly placed in Christ alone.

A.—The believing Hebrews appear to have been at that period much persecuted by their Jewish brethren.

B.—And for that reason they were in greater danger of being led into apostasy, of the consequences of which the Apostle draws the most fearful picture.

A.—This Epistle shows St. Paul's great concern for the believers of his own nation.

B.—So that the calumny with which he was persecuted through life, of so devoting himself to the conversion of the Gentiles as to be indifferent or hostile to the Jews, is proved to be unfounded. His strong feelings for their welfare, expressed in the Epistle to the Romans; his writing this Epistle to them just after his first imprisonment at Rome; and his subsequent visit to Judea, for their spiritual advantage; show the deep interest which he took in their salvation.

A.—What is the general argument of this Epistle?

B.—The general argument is, that as the Mosaic institution was a preparatory type, and the Christian dispensation its antitype, the latter was superior to the former, as the “substance” to the “shadow.” But this general argument has several highly interesting branches.

A.—One of these is, I presume, contained in the first chapter?

B.—It is ; and it rests on this, that Christ is “the Son ;” which shows that the Gospel was spoken to us by the immediate agency of a being whose *nature* was not only above that of “the prophets,” but that of “the angels,” by whose ministry the law was given ; and that consequently he was Divine. From the superior and Divine dignity of Christ, who was the visible Teacher of the Gospel, St. Paul argues its superior perfection. He supports this argument, too, from passages in the Old Testament, which show that the Messiah was there spoken of as the Son of God ; an appellation which with the Prophets was manifestly used to express his Divinity, because they invest him with the attributes of God, and ascribe the creation, the upholding, and the final destruction of the visible universe to him. The Apostle’s argument therefore may be thus drawn out : If Jesus is, as you believe, the *Messias*, then he is *the Son of God*, for your own Scriptures so designate *Messias* ; if *the Son*, then is He *Divine* ; if *Divine*, his *nature* is infinitely higher than that of the prophets, and that of the angels, by whose ministry you boast that the law was given ; and if “God in these last days hath spoken to us by his Son,” then the superior

dignity of the messenger shows the superior glory and grace of the message.

A.—And from these premises, I perceive, he draws a most solemn practical conclusion in chapter ii. 1—4, as to the impossibility of our escaping punishment, “if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken **BY THE LORD,**” &c.

B.—A conclusion indeed which ought to fill us with holy fear.

A.—What does the Apostle mean by verse 5, of this chapter, “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak?”

B.—“The world to come,” was a phrase in use among the Jews to express the kingdom of Messiah. But the affairs of the Christian dispensation are not administered by angels, whose frequent appearances and interposition the Jews thought did so much honour to the law; they are administered by **ONE** who, according to a passage in the eighth Psalm, was indeed made “lower than the angels,” (or “for a little while lower than the angels,” as it is read in the margin,) but is now “crowned with glory and honour;” all things, even the highest angels, being made subject to him.

A.—Why, in pursuing this argument, does the Apostle dwell so forcibly upon the incarnation and sufferings of Christ?

B.—To show that the lowly state and humiliating sufferings which our Lord endured, subjects at which the Jews greatly stumbled, were necessary to be undergone by the Messias, in order to qualify him for those

offices of glory and grace by which the administration of the new dispensation was raised above every thing which gave honour to the law. As “the Captain of our salvation,” the great Leader of his elect host to glory, he was “made perfect,” fully qualified for his saving offices, “through sufferings;” by a sacrificial “death, he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage;” and by being made “like unto his brethren,” in their humble and suffering condition, he became “a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

A.—And thus, great and consolatory general truths are brought out of this particular question with the Jews.

B.—Which forms one of the striking excellencies of St. Paul’s writings, and was, no doubt, so overruled by the Spirit of inspiration, that every part of the sacred word might be applicable to all ages, and to all people.

A.—The force of the argument in the commencement of chapter iv., appears still to rest upon the Sonship of Christ.

B.—Yes, Moses as a **SERVANT**, and Christ as a **SON**, are placed in contrast; and here also, the Divinity of the Son, as such, again breaks forth; this Son was the *Creator* of the whole *house* or Jewish family over

which Moses presided. “ For every house is builded by some one ; but he that built all things is God.”

A.—How does the Apostle proceed ?

B.—After warning the Hebrews lest they should imitate the unbelief and apostasies of their fathers in the wilderness, and come short of the heavenly rest, of which the rest of Canaan was but the type, he proceeds to show, that the priesthood of Christ was superior to the Levitical priesthood, because, according to the Divine prediction, it was conformed to a different and a higher order, even that of Melchisedec.

A.—This was that mystical royal priest of Canaan to whom Abraham paid both homage and tythes.

B.—And the Apostle therefore uses this as his proof that the priesthood of Melchisedec was superior to that of Aaron, who paid tythes to him in his progenitor. Abraham, too, was “ blessed ” by him, “ and without all contradiction the less is blessed of the greater.” Thus you see the conclusion to which St. Paul leads us. If the priesthood of Aaron was inferior to that of Melchisedec, and Christ’s priesthood was to be of the order of Melchisedec, and yet the superior order of Melchisedec was itself but a faint shadow or type of that of “ the High Priest of our profession ; ” then is the priesthood of Christ exalted inconceivably above that of Aaron.

A.—Now I perceive the force of his argument ; but what conformity is there between the priesthood of Christ, and that of Melchisedec ?

B.—Our Lord, like him, unites the offices of king and priest, which Aaron did not ; he is in a far more

perfect sense than any man could be, however holy, "King of righteousness, and Prince of peace ;" and his priesthood is not hereditary, was not received from others who went before, nor will it ever be transmitted to successors. Thus it was like that of Melchisedec, who is said to have been "without father or mother," "without beginning of days, or end of life," as recorded in Scripture. For who his predecessors were ; when he entered upon his office ; and when he was removed from it by death ; are circumstances purposely left out of the account given of him in the Old Testament, that he might be the type of Him whose priesthood was *peculiar* and *personal*, and who was "to abide a priest for ever."

A.—Now I think I understand the meaning of what is said of Melchisedec, which used formerly to be very mysterious to me.

B.—The Apostle adds other marks of the superiority of our Lord's priesthood : As that he was made a High Priest by the solemn oath of God ; that he ministers in the heavenly places, of which the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon were but shadows ; that he was without sin ; that he offered his "own blood," of the virtue of which, the blood of the ancient sacrifices (of themselves of no efficacy with respect to the conscience) was but the typical representation ; that his oblation, such is its perfection, never need to be repeated like the Levitical sacrifices ; that it "cleanses the conscience from dead works ;" and has obtained "eternal redemption for us." These and other topics

connected with the superiority of Christ's atonement and intercession, are dwelt upon at large, and placed in the most convincing and instructive views.

A.—I am then to conclude that the Apostle, in this Epistle, proves that Christ is superior to angels in nature; superior to Moses in authority; and superior to Aaron in the *order* of his priesthood, in the *efficacy* of his sacrifice, in his ministering in *holy places* not made with hands, and in the duration, prevalence, and universality of his intercession.

B.—You have rightly traced the outline of the argument which the Apostle fills up with so much elegance and force; and the manner in which he applies these truths to the practical ends which he proposed in writing, is most worthy your consideration.

A.—He appeals in several passages to the fears of the Hebrews.

B.—And justly so; for the apostasy of a Jew, and especially of a Jew then living in Palestine, had a peculiar aggravation.

A.—How so?

B.—Because most of them had been the witnesses of the miracles of our Lord, or of those wrought by the Apostles in confirmation of the Gospel; and as none of them who renounced Christianity could be again admitted into the synagogues without blaspheming Christ; and probably not without concurring in that particular blasphemy invented by the Pharisees, that our Lord and his Apostles wrought miracles by the influence of evil spirits; they made themselves par-

takers of that “sin against the Holy Ghost” which put them out of the reach of salvation.

A.—By this circumstance, then, you would perhaps have me explain those terrible passages in this Epistle which relate to the apostasy of believing Hebrews.

B.—As, for instance, that in chapter vi. 4—8 : “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance,” &c. The common people might possibly be seduced to receive the blasphemy of the Pharisees as accounting for the miracles of Christ, because of the great authority which the Doctors of their law had over them ; but the Pharisees themselves, in this respect, sinned *wilfully* ; and all who had been “enlightened” by the Gospel, and had “tasted of the heavenly gift,” having been once convinced of the folly and fallacy of this wretched theory, could not again adopt the blasphemy but against their own convictions ; and so, like the Pharisees, they sinned “*wilfully*,” and fell into the same condemnation.

A.—This will well explain chap. x. 26 : “For if we sin *wilfully*, after that we have received *the knowledge of the truth*, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,” &c.

B.—Certainly the particular sin there spoken of is apostasy, with all the aggravating circumstances which attended it in the case of those to whom the Apostle wrote.

A.—What connexion have the instances of faith in the “Elders” of the Jewish Church, as stated in chapter xi., with the Apostle’s argument?

B.—He there shows that all the eminent saints of old, although they were often exposed to great difficulties, and severe trials, were distinguished for the constancy of their faith, which was rewarded accordingly; and thus he exhorts the Hebrews to hold fast their “confidence” in Christ, and assures them also of a “great recompense of reward.” He exhibits these instances as so many animating examples to the believers of that and every subsequent age, and thus applies the moral of the whole, chap. xii. 1 :—“Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,” &c.

A.—You regard this as a very important Epistle?

B.—One of the most important of all the Pauline Epistles; both as it fully states the doctrine of the atonement, and as it affords a key to the interpretation of the types of the Old Testament. It throws a stream of evangelical light upon many texts in the writings of Moses, and upon many parts of the ceremonial law, which would otherwise have been little understood.

A.—It appears also to contain many very beautiful passages, in point of composition.

B.—In this respect, you may call it one of the most finished productions of St. Paul’s pen; always remembering when we speak in this manner, that, although

the genius of each sacred writer is seen in his writings, that genius was not only controlled, but heightened by inspiration ; and that in a vast number of instances the thoughts could only have been communicated by the Divine Spirit, who searches the deep things of God. Wonderfully felicitous in expression, for instance, is that declaration of the essential glory of Christ in chapter i. 3 : “Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person :” But the words are not only striking and beautiful, but declaratory of a great theological doctrine which the Holy Spirit only could have revealed. The former of these characters, “the brightness of his glory,” is drawn from a luminous body ; and when the Father is compared to the original fountain of light, and the Son to the effulgence or ray streaming from it, we are taught that the essence of both is the same ; that the one is inseparable from, and is not to be conceived without, the other ; and consequently, that neither of them ever was, or could be, alone. Thus the Son is hereby declared to be of the same nature and eternity with the Father ; and from hence, more particularly, the Nicene Creed has drawn its clauses, “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God ; of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.”

A.—What is the import of the other part of the description,—“the express image of his person ?”

B.—The “image” is the character impressed by a seal, and thus we are taught that all that is in the Father is in the Son ; in other words, that all the per-

fections of the one are the perfections of the other, and answer to each other both in kind and degree, as the impression upon wax answers to the engraving on the seal by which it is made. To this passage, I may add that in the fourth chapter, which speaks of “the Word of God.”

A.—Is not that a personification of the word spoken or preached?

B.—Rather it is Christ the *personal* Word ; and to him omniscience is not only attributed, but that attribute is described, so to speak, in the most *piercing* manner. “ For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight ; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

A.—This language appears singular.

B.—It is a powerful metaphor taken from the operations of the Priest, who, in dissecting the sacrifices, separated those parts which were the most secret, and most closely joined together, examining them with the utmost care, lest there should be any unsoundness, which would have vitiated the whole offering.

A.—I see the force of the allusion, and feel its application ; it suggests the words of David, “ Behold, thou requirest truth in the inward parts.”

B.—The passage in the twelfth chapter may also be particularly noticed. In this, St. Paul compares the

Mosaic and Christian dispensations, the former to Mount Sinai, the latter to Mount Zion. This allegory is not only of a highly sublime character, but it instructs us also in the typical designation of those celebrated mountains. The law was given from Sinai ; but the temple was built upon Zion, and was the place where God, through successive ages, was approached through sacrifice, and from which he gave his blessing to his people. The Jews, who, disregarding the Gospel, depended for justification upon their own law, are therefore said to “ come to the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,” &c., whilst the true believer, flying from all these terrors to the refuge of Christ’s atonement, comes to “ Mount Zion,” the peaceful residence of God’s mercy, “ and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels ; to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.”

A.—“ The general assembly” is here mentioned, I presume, in allusion to the assembling of the tribes at the annual feasts at Jerusalem ; but what may be meant by “ the Church of the first-born ? ”

B.—Under the law, the first-born were to be “ sanctified ” to the Lord, and Moses was commanded to register “ the number of their names.” Thus are we

taught that the members of Christ's true Church are all sanctified to God, and that none but such are "written" or enrolled "in heaven."

A.—Does the Apostle confine this fine description of God's spiritual Church to the true and visible Church on earth?

B.—Certainly not; the family of heaven and earth are *one*. They form one society under one Head: We are joined to this society in spirit now; but hereafter we shall, if "faithful unto death," be present with it personally and visibly for ever.

A.—Which of the two Apostles called JAMES was the author of the Epistle?

B.—It is most probably ascribed to James the Less, the son of Alpheus, who presided over the Church at Jerusalem. He was a very holy man, and on that account was surnamed *the Just*; and was put to death in a tumult of the Jews, A. D. 62.

A.—Why is it inscribed "to the twelve tribes scattered abroad?"

B.—Because it was designed particularly for the use of the Jews; and as many of the ten tribes returned with those of Judah and Benjamin, after the termination of seventy years' captivity in Babylon; and many others of them mingled also with those who were resident, as we before observed, in the cities colonized by the Greeks under Alexander and his successors, and in other places; the Jews of that age were often designated as the twelve tribes.

A.—What is the leading object of this Epistle?

B.—To enforce Christian practice against a corruption of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

A.—How are St. James and St. Paul to be reconciled on this point?

B.—Very easily; for St. Paul teaches justification by a true and living faith; which St. James no where denies. He denies only that a man can be saved by a dead or inoperative faith.

A.—But St. Paul says, that Abraham was “justified by faith;” and I see that St. James says he was “justified by works.”

B.—But you will observe that Abraham’s justification of which St. Paul speaks was *before* the birth of Isaac; that of which St. James speaks, when he offered Isaac on the altar. And you will also remark that at the former time St. James himself allows that Abraham was justified by faith; and urges his subsequent obedience to prove that he was so,—“and the Scripture was fulfilled,” or established, “which says, Abraham,” many years before this, “believed in God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.” So that St. Paul affirms that Abraham was justified *before God* by faith; St. James, that he was justified, or proved *before men* to have been, at the time St. Paul refers to, justified by a faith which led to subsequent obedience. Thus they entirely agree.

A.—This is now clear, and I thank you for the explanation.

B.—In reading this Epistle, you will observe that there is great depth of heavenly wisdom expressed in a concise, sententious, and somewhat proverbial manner;

so that the sentiments of the Apostle are well adapted to fix themselves in the memory. There are also some passages of great beauty and elegance.

A.—The whole of the first chapter appears singularly beautiful.

B.—It is a collection of most important sentiments exquisitely expressed ; and St. James's description of “the wisdom from above,” iv. 17, is equal to St. Paul's description of charity, before pointed out, although more concise.—“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” Thus as St. Paul shows the vanity of knowledge without charity, St. James exhibits its value when united with it, and teaches us that true wisdom and true charity form the perfect Christian.

A.—St. James deals much in reproof.

B.—And yet they are the reproofs of kindness ; and you cannot think of him but under the character of a mild and paternal Apostle, whose fidelity was nevertheless inflexible.

A.—The latter part of the Epistle draws a sad picture of the moral state of the Jews.

B.—It marks a people ripening for destruction, and for this reason the Apostle so earnestly guards the believing Jews against the pernicious example of their brethren after the flesh, among whom they dwelt. Through these he utters his solemn reproofs and warnings to the impenitent of all ages. Pride, oppression, and carnality were become the leading characters of a people, profess-

ing to know God, and in works denying him ; and the immoral habits of this unbelieving people in that day sufficiently account for their stubborn resistance to all the evidence of the truth of the Gospel, which they hated for its purity.

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## CONVERSATION XXIV.

EPISTLES OF PETER, JOHN, JUDE.—THE REVELATION TO  
ST. JOHN.

A.—THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER is addressed to “ the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ; ” who were they ?

B.—They were not Gentile Christians, because such could not be denominated “ *strangers*.” They must, therefore, have been Jewish Christians scattered over those extensive regions ; which affords another proof of the wide diffusion of Christianity at that early period.

A.—The Apostle, in the conclusion of his Epistle, says, “ The Church at Babylon saluteth you ; ” was this Epistle then written from Babylon ?

B.—The Jews were in the habit of giving mystic appellations to cities and nations in their captivities and dispersions. It was customary with them, for instance, to call their heathen enemies by the name of Edom ; and as Rome was the great oppressor of the nations in that day, as Babylon had been formerly, that appellation was given by them to the metropolis of the Cæsars. For this reason, many of the learned are of opinion, that this Epistle was written from Rome.

A.—What was its design ?

B.—To exhort these dispersed Jewish Christians to practical holiness, to a quiet and blameless life, to patience under persecutions, and to various other virtues, all which subjects are treated with a natural eloquence, a heavenly wisdom, and a mild and persuasive spirit. Peter's SECOND EPISTLE was also written to the same persons, and he urges the same exhortations with the authority of a father in Christ, standing on the brink of eternity, and giving his last testimony to the truth and excellency of the religion of which he had been so long an Apostle. In the latter part of this Epistle, he guards them against the bad principles and unholy practices of the false teachers and their disciples, who now began still more numerously to abound ; and enforces his exhortations by a solemn admonition drawn from the final judgment.

A.—These Epistles always appear to me to have a peculiar persuasiveness and power.

B.—Your judgment of them is correct. Both Epistles have called forth the admiration of the great critics Erasmus and Scaliger. Ostervald says, that the First Epistle is one of the finest books in the New Testament, that the Second is written with great strength and majesty, and that both give the strongest internal proof of their Divine origin.

A.—Why does St. Peter, in both Epistles, particularly enjoin obedience to governors ?

B.—Because the Jews were a restless and factious people ; and contended that they were not under any

obligation to obey any heathen magistrates. Christians are therefore taught to submit themselves “ to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake : Whether it be to the king as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.”

A.—As the name of the Apostle John does not occur in his First Epistle, how does it appear that it was written by him ?

B.—From the testimony of the earliest antiquity, which is confirmed by internal evidence, the style having all the peculiarities of St. John’s Gospel. This Epistle is generally supposed to have been written but a short time before the destruction of the Jewish polity by the Romans. It is called a General Epistle because it is not addressed to any particular Church ; but, in truth, it has not the epistolary form of the other General Epistles of St. James and St. Peter. It is rather a didactic general discourse upon the principles, the experience, and practice of Christianity.

A.—What was its leading design ?

B.—Admirably simple as the sentences of the Apostle John are when taken separately, the connection of them with each other is often rather difficult to trace, and especially as they often assume the form of great leading truths delivered as aphorisms. The value of his writings is, however, thereby heightened, although their interpretation requires the closer attention. To enter into the meaning of this Epistle, we must consider the errors of the age in which it was written, and against which

it was directed. St. John lived, you will recollect, to a later period than any of the other Apostles, and saw the pernicious heresies, to which the other Apostles allude as the offspring of pagan philosophy, assume a more mature form, more widely corrupting the first principles of Christianity, and leading the souls of men to destruction through vain and endless speculations.

A.—What are the errors you referred to?

B.—The first were those of a semi-Christian and semi-Pagan sect, called the *DOCETÆ*, who, influenced by a notion we have before adverted to, the inherent depravity of matter, pretended that it was impossible that Christ should assume our flesh, and that his body was but a mere appearance or phantom.

A.—A wicked conclusion founded upon very silly premises.

B.—Truly so ; but this notion of the evil necessarily inherent in matter had a deep hold upon the philosophers of that age ; and so philosophizing Christians then, like some of their descendants now, made their Christianity give way to their philosophy.

A.—Perhaps then it is in reference to this notion of our Lord having a body in appearance only, which necessarily involved a denial of the atonement of Christ, because in that case his sufferings must have been also merely apparent, that St. John alludes in the first chapter, where, with so much emphasis, he declares that not only had their eyes seen, but their “ hands had handled, the word of life.”

B.—This is very probable, and also that he had the

same error in view, when he says, “ And every spirit which confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” But there was another heresy to which he refers. The father of this was CERINTHUS, a popular heresiarch of that early period. He was a Jew, had studied philosophy at Alexandria, and then propagated a system of Christianity framed upon his philosophical opinions. Like other Gnostics, he held Christ to be one of the *æons* or emanations from God, of which we have before spoken, and also that the world was created by one *æon*, and redeemed by another ; both of which notions seem to be adverted to in the beginning of St. John’s Gospel. It was afterwards, probably, that he fell into another error, (for men who will not submit their reason to the word of God are never at one stay,) which was, to deny that Jesus and Christ were the same person. In this he dissented from the Docetæ, who thought our Lord’s body *a phantom* merely. He acknowledged that Jesus had a real existence, but that the Christ came upon him at baptism and left him at death. This notion, too, arose out of the philosophic dream, that a pure spirit could not be personally united to a material body.

A.—The heresy, then, which denied that Jesus and Christ were the same person, existing at so early a period, will explain other passages in this Epistle : “ Who is a liar, but he that denieth that JESUS is the CHRIST ? ” and “ whosoever shall confess that JESUS, ” as well as CHRIST, “ is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”

B.—There is little doubt but that the Cerinthian heresy is glanced at in these passages; but you are also to observe, that they are so expressed as to be directed against all Jews who denied that Jesus was the Messiah or Christ; and all who in modern times deny the pre-existence of Christ; or that in his pre-existent nature he is the Son of God.

A.—St. John intermingles doctrinal statements with many exhortations to holiness and charity.

B.—Because all those false teachers were men of corrupt lives, and fomented divisions and strifes in the Churches by their proud and heated disputation. But it is little to say that St. John exhorts to holiness and brotherly love; he makes both *the test* of true Christianity, and shows how awfully men deceive themselves and others, when their profession of our Divine religion leads neither to practical holiness nor to the Christian temper.

A.—I thought the term *antichrist* had been chiefly used to designate Popery, yet it is used in this Epistle.

B.—Whatever opposes Christ's true and pure doctrine, and, at the same time, pretends *his authority*, is here called antichrist; and Popery is so denominated only by way of eminence, as being the most extended and systematized form of anti-christian doctrine which has appeared.

A.—These observations will assist me the better to understand this Epistle.

B.—But you will go but partially into its meaning, unless you carefully mark that deep and spiritual

inward Christianity which it so forcibly portrays. A true Christian “walks in the light ;” is “cleansed from all sin, by the blood of Christ ;” has “fellowship” with God ; “dwells in love ;” “dwells in God ;” “loves the brethren ;” “overcomes the world ;” “is born of God,” “doth not commit sin ;” keeps all God’s commandments, and “the new commandment, to love one another,” in particular : He is taught heavenly wisdom, by “the anointing” or unction of the Holy Spirit, and has “passed” from a state of spiritual “death,” into a state of spiritual “life.” It was not therefore for doctrinal orthodoxy merely, that this venerable Apostle contends in this most important discourse ; but for that internal work of the Spirit, from which alone all true external holiness, all meek, lowly, and loving tempers, and all vital fellowship with Christ can result.

A.—The SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN is addressed to “the elect lady and her children.”

B.—This was probably some Christian lady of eminence, distinguished for her hospitable reception of the primitive ministers of the Gospel, on their journeys to different Churches. The object of it is, to guard her against receiving the teachers of false doctrine, and he particularly specifies those who denied that “Jesus Christ was come in the flesh,” alluding to the sects of the Docetæ and Cerinthians, before mentioned. This Christian matron is also commended for the religious manner in which she had educated her children, and is exhorted to steadfastness in the faith.

A.—THE THIRD EPISTLE is addressed to *Gaius*; who was he?

B.—A converted Gentile; probably a member of the Church at Corinth, distinguished for his hospitality to the saints, and to ministers on their visits and travels. For his faith and liberality, he is affectionately commended by St. John. The Apostle, on the contrary, threatens *Diotrepes* with the censures of his apostolical authority for his affectation of pre-eminence in the Church, and his harsh treatment of its members. This shows that St. John knew well how to unite, with his natural softness and kindness of manner, the firm and unshrinking exercise of a holy discipline, when the case required it.

A.—The next Epistle is that of JUDE; was he one of the Apostles?

B.—Yes; the same who is called Judas, and also Lebbeus and Thaddeus. He was the brother of James the Less, and cousin-german of our Lord. His Epistle bears a strong resemblance to the latter part of St. Peter's Second Epistle, and, like that, was intended to guard Christians against false teachers, and their disciples, who cancelled all the obligations to morality, and practised and taught all manner of licentiousness. It is here to be remarked, that it does not follow that all these were members of the Christian Church. The heretical teachers belonging to the various sects of the Gnostics formed a distinct system, and collected themselves into separate communities; but as they had formed their doctrine out of both Christianity and philosophy, they

passed popularly for Christians, and brought great reproach upon the Christian name by their misconduct. They were, however, constantly endeavouring to make converts among Christians, and too often succeeded. Some of these apostates were expelled from the Christian Churches; and others, where discipline was relaxed, were permitted to remain among them. This circumstance caused great trouble to the Apostles, and these perverters of truth were therefore dealt with in great and just severity. "In the Epistle of Jude," says Bishop Benson, "there is an energy, a force, a grandeur of expression and style, an apparent labour for words and images expressive enough to give the reader a just and adequate idea of the profligate he exposes; and the whole is admirably calculated to show how deeply the holy Apostle was grieved at the scandalous immoralities of those who feigned themselves Christians, and with what fervour and courage he tore off the mask from these hypocrites, that the Church and the world might see the turpitude and deformity that lurked beneath it."

A.—The last Book in the sacred canon is entitled, THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE; how came the title, *the Divine*, to be given to him?

B.—Not by inspired authority; but it was used at an early period to mark the high character of his prophetic office, as distinguished by the depth of his acquaintance with the Divine counsels.

A.—When were these Revelations made to St. John?

B.—In the reign of the Emperor Domitian, when

the Church was under persecution, and himself in banishment in the island of Patmos.

A.—What may be its general design?

B.—It will occur to you, that when the pagan Roman empire had begun to arouse itself to persecute the Churches in every place, with a furious and exterminating zeal, the thoughts of Christians would be turned very anxiously to the result. Still further, those general persecutions succeeded each other with increasing violence, and with but short respites, to the number of ten; the last of which, under Diocletian, destroyed such incredible numbers of Christians, that the advocates of Paganism boasted that the victory over the hated religion of Christ was complete. In such circumstances, the hearts of many would naturally “tremble for the ark of God;” and had they not been supported by prophecies which referred to these events, and previously indicated the overthrow of pagan Rome, and the triumphs of the Church, the most zealous and heroic might have been involved in much perplexity. Again, this Church, so marvellously delivered from pagan persecution, by the accession of Constantine the Great, fell away from faith and purity; and days almost as dark as those of Paganism fell upon it in the middle ages. It became persecuting itself, and the few faithful were doomed to suffer, from nominal Christians, what the early Christians endured from pagan idolaters. In these ages, the few and scattered followers of Christ needed the same kind of support and consolation, as those of the persecuted primi-

tive Church. The latter saw the formidable civil power of pagan Rome arrayed against the cause of Christ, and threatening it with extermination ; the former saw the eastern and western antichrists, embodied with, and upheld by, all secular authority, and carrying on the same warfare against the faithful, and aiming at nothing less than their violent extirpation. You can therefore, I think, easily infer from this, the purpose of the prophecies of this Book.

A.—Truly, as they point out the successive overthrow of all persecuting and corrupt systems, and the secular powers which uphold them, and open the glorious scene of the ultimate triumphs and glory of the Church, I see a clear exhibition of the wisdom and goodness of God in providing for his people, and especially in dark and troubled times, the support and consolations of a Book opening to them views so important and joyous. Still, however, may I not ask whether the obscurity of its predictions did not diminish its effect ?

B—I presume, not. The prophecies in this Book are not generally more obscure than those which related to Messiah in the Old Testament. Yet these were sufficiently understood as to their *general import* to preserve the faith and hope of the ancient saints through successive ages. You are also to distinguish between the obscurity of a prophecy as to the minute circumstances and the particular time of its fulfilment, and its leading import. I do not think that you even profess to know much of the meaning of this Book ; you have not studied it ; and you are too young to enter upon it with

the view of going very deeply into its meaning. Your own good sense will dictate to you to study the plainer parts of the New Testament with all the assistances you can meet with to open to you their meaning, before you encounter these difficulties ; and yet, I doubt not, that you have already derived, from reading it, general views of great importance. Tell me then, what are the impressions which it has made upon you ?

A.—You have put the matter in a way I did not anticipate ; and yet I confess that I am conscious of having been impressed with several general considerations, as I have gone through it, rather bewildered amidst its sublime scenes and awful imagery, than understanding any one prophecy clearly.

B.—Recollect these impressions, and state them in order.

A.—The messages to the seven Churches, besides the particular truths which they contain, suggested to me the serious moral, that the eye of Christ is upon those who profess his name every where ; and that, gracious as he is to the sincere, and patient as to the unfruitful, He is still a righteous Judge in his Church ; so that we ought “ to tremble for fear of his judgments ” as well as “ hope in his mercy.” I could not, also, but be impressed with the thought, that we are taught by this Book that the government of this world is in the hands of ONE who is higher than the highest ; that nothing happens by chance ; that when proud and persecuting powers are permitted for a time, it must be for purposes of wisdom not yet fully deve-

loped, because they are with infinite ease cast down by Him against whom they exalt themselves ; and that, at his command, mighty angels fly, and all the elements of nature are moved to avenge upon them his cause, and to be the agents of his “just and holy judgments.” I could not, also, but remark how delightful a contrast this Book exhibits between the scenes opened in heaven, and those presented by this earth, dark, violent, troubled, and wretched : And the visions of glory, of God, the orders of angels, the hosts of glorified saints, and their elevated and blissful employment, seemed to render it of very little consequence what afflictions any of Christ’s persecuted saints endured individually, for a few short days on earth, when this invisible and glorious throng seemed arranged on the very confines of the world of light, to welcome the persecuted faithful into “the joy of their Lord.”

B.—And you must now perceive, from these general impressions made upon you in reading this Book, how admirably adapted it was, especially to all suffering and gloomy periods of the Church. In them it has been “a light arising in darkness ;” and we shall never know, till the day of eternity, how many depressed spirits it has cheered, what vigour it has given to the zeal of saints, and what strength it has imparted to them to suffer. But have you learned no other general truth from it ?

A.—I have learned that the cause of Christ shall ultimately triumph ; and that, “though these shall make war upon the Lamb,” yet “the Lamb shall overcome them.”

B.—And surely this is a most interesting prospect, that in “the evening time” of the world “it shall be light ;” and that, lashed as the stream of time has been throughout its course by storms and tempests, and darkened by the lowering clouds which have swept over it, it shall at length flow on in tranquillity, brightened by the reflections of clearer skies. He who considers the felicity, *personal, domestic, and national*, which must result from the establishment of the spiritual reign of Christ, extended over all nations, will in deep and transported feeling anticipate the grateful exultation of that sublime song, mentioned in the fifth chapter, where the Apostle hears “every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

A.—I think I have read some writer who observes, that although the Revelation is a very mortifying Book to a mind eager in pursuit of the knowledge of future things, it is a very edifying one to a heart solicitous about maxims and precepts.

B.—And so you will find it ; but although much obscurity, as to those of its prophecies which manifestly relate to the future, shrouds its mystic visions, yet many parts of it have had a very clear fulfilment. The destruction of the pagan Roman empire ; the rise, triumph, and decline of Mohammedanism ; the rise of the western antichrist, its heresies and blasphemies, its persecutions of the saints, and visible decline, have all been very

satisfactorily pointed out, by many divines who have written upon this Book, as fulfilled, together with various other particular circumstances both of judgment and mercy which have been involved in these great events. And as pious and learned men will always be found to mark the events of history, and compare them with these prophecies, they will gradually unfold their import; and the whole, when fulfilled, will stand like many of the prophetic Books of the Old Testament,—a glorious monument that our religion has Him for its Author, who “knows the end from the beginning.”

A.—There are, I believe, many persons who pretend very rashly to explain these unfulfilled predictions.

B.—And when you meet with very confident persons of this class, you may recollect the following sentiments of the equally learned and modest Sir Isaac Newton: “The folly of interpreters has been to foretell times and things by this prophecy of the Revelation, as if God designed to make them Prophets. The design of God was, when he gave them this and the prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men’s curiosity by enabling them to foreknow things, but to the end, that, after they were fulfilled, they might be interpreted by the event; and so his own providence, not the wisdom or skill of the interpreters, be manifested thereby to the world.”

A.—The imagery of this Book seems to me to possess a grandeur, and, if I may so express myself, a *heavenliness*, above even that employed by the Prophets of the Old Testament.

B.—It is often of the same order, and in many places

is drawn from that employed by the ancient Prophets ; but the whole is greatly heightened by the “ light and immortality brought to light by the Gospel.” The entrance of Christ into the holy places, not made with hands, opened their glories to the view of this great evangelical prophet with a distinctness which was not, and could not be, vouchsafed under the former dispensation ; and as to the style generally, the remarks of an eminent critic are equally just and forcibly expressed : “ It is in vain to look for more lofty descriptions or majestic images than you find in this sacred Book. Could the acclamations and hallelujahs of heaven be expressed with more magnificence than by the shouts of vast multitudes, the roaring of many waters, and the sound of loud thunders, whilst all this strength of sound is tempered with a sweetness and harmony suited to the celestial ear, and the most exalted taste ? The description of the Son of God, chapter xix. 11—17, is in all the pomp and grandeur of language. We have every circumstance which most forcibly expresses power and justice, majesty and goodness, to raise admiration, and to mingle awe with love. The conclusion of the whole, too, is worthy of closing the Divine volume of inspiration. It leaves the thoughts in heaven, to which all its doctrines, examples, and institutions are intended to lead us ; and although the description of the heavenly Jerusalem is in the style of the Easterns, its force must be every where felt. Earthly riches and splendour, gold and precious stones, trees and streams, are but the feeble

images of its magnificence and beauty, whilst the glory of God lightens it, the nations of the saved only walk there ; no defilement enters it, ‘there is no more curse,’ ‘and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away.’ ”

But as we have only hastily glanced, in these Conversations, at the different Books of the New Testament, I must now refer you to a more diligent and constant study of them, with prayer to God, that he may, by his Holy Spirit, “lead you into all truth,” and make his Gospel to you “the power of God unto salvation.” The evidence of the truth of these holy writings as built upon the fulfilment of prophecy and great and numerous miracles, we have occasionally remarked ; but I wish, before we part, to impress upon your attention that *internal fitness and excellence* which appears in every part of them, and which will display itself to you with brighter lustre the more carefully and diligently you read them. Whatever is of importance for man as a moral, accountable, and immortal being *to know*, is here taught, and that in principles so deep and full as to afford inexhaustible subjects of contemplation ; whatever is necessary for man’s moral dignity and true happiness *to attain*, is not only described, but is the subject of gracious promise, so that the holiness which is so perfectly and beautifully exhibited is matter of possible attainment to all who seek it. The Scriptures are Books especially for *the troubled and afflicted* ; and

we can be in no case of destitution or sorrow, but we must feel that they sympathize with us, and open to us the way to a “throne of grace,” where we may “find mercy, and grace to help in time of need;” we must *die*, but their hopes turn the shadows of death into the light of morning, to all who believe on Him who is “the resurrection and the life;” and a *future world* is now no longer a land unknown, a dark and uncertain region, exciting a fearful imagination in proportion to its obscurity. The gates of life, eternal and blissful life, were thrown open to us by the ascension of our Lord; and his faithful promise was left behind, “Where I am ye shall be also.” Thus our present and future condition are both equally provided for; and the path of faith and duty is the certain path of “glory, honour, and immortality.” If then you leave this Divine religion, whither will you go? Infidelity promises you nothing but endless doubts; it quenches every celestial hope which Christianity has kindled in the heart of man; destroys every principle of virtuous action, and leaves those who are seduced by its affectation of superior knowledge, to a life spent without God, and a death without hope. Fly, then, its artifices; and forsake not “the guide of your youth, nor the covenant of your God.” Nor rest in a nominal Christianity, “having a form of godliness, but denying,” or remaining destitute of, “its power.” Walk under an impression of the Divine presence and majesty; let your whole trust be in the atonement of your Saviour; yield up your heart to the hallowing influences of the Holy

Spirit; greatly reverence the Sabbaths of the Lord, and the ordinances of his house; neglect no duty; "be instant in prayer;" mark the providences of God, and trust your affairs in his hand; take no step in life without asking his counsel; fly to him in all exigences; and, finally, in your thoughts steadily connect time with eternity. You have been making inquiries, in these Conversations, respecting Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, the distinguished names of the three grand dispensations of religion to mankind; but "where are they?" All these venerable characters you have seen in succession pass before you, with the men of their generation, into another and an eternal state. You are borne along by the same ever-flowing stream, and shall soon be no longer an inhabitant of earth. Eternity is your home; and it shall be a blissful one, if you follow these great examples. The track of their footsteps still shines, and will for ever shine, in the darkness of this world to guide yours; mark it with steady attention; let no difficulty, no temptation affright or seduce you from it; "encompassed" as you are "with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race which is set before you, *looking unto Jesus.*"

THE END.

